re any
Captain
"The
among
a high

s men-
BODY's
of the
New
taff of
kine is
is on
is in

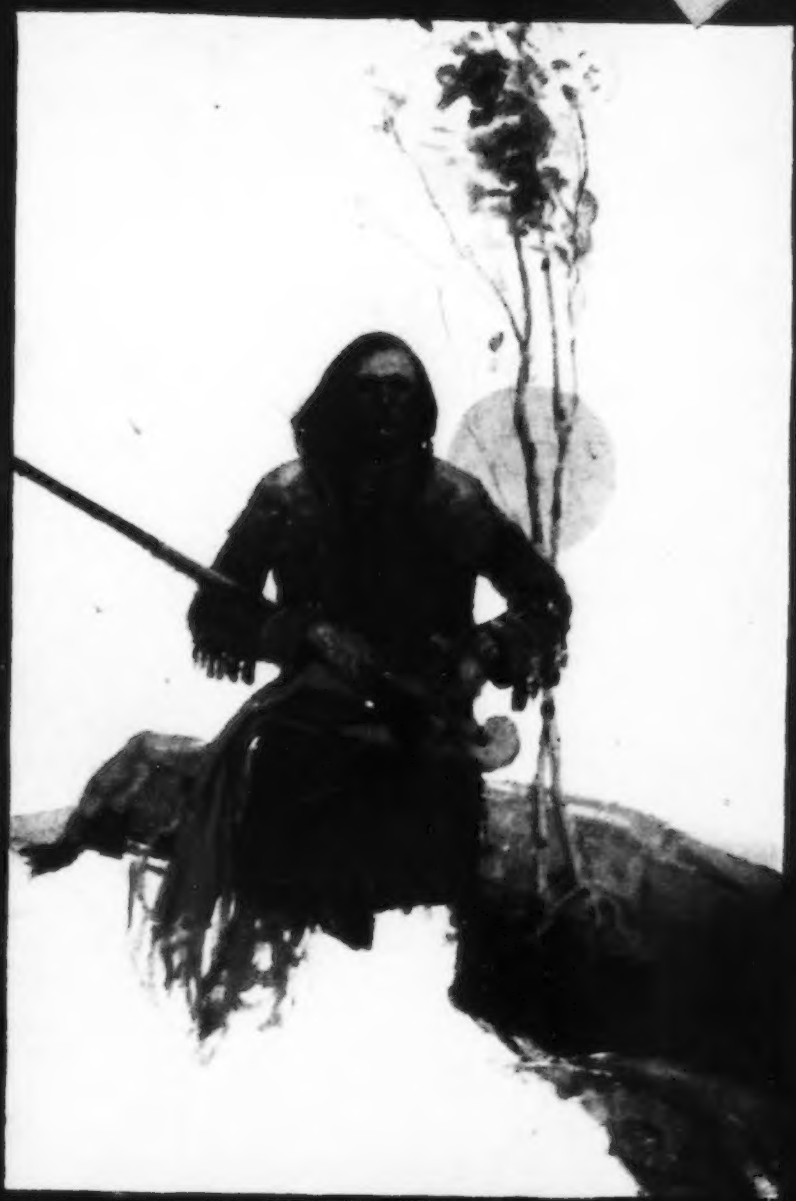
desk.

. G.

Everybody's

Mrs Wm Kell
47 Fuller St
Waltham Mass Boston 4
Apr27

L 1927
25c



A Whirlwind Western Novelette

by WILLIAM CORCORAN

and a New Novel *of Mystery*

Let this Entirely Different Cook Book Serve to Make You Acquainted with the New

CLEAN CONVENIENT FUEL

It Serves You in a Hundred Ways

Your Own Recipe Book
by Mary Davis
"The Barnswallow"

THIS COOK STOVE

Together with Extinguisher, Can Opener and Can of Sterno Canned Heat, Costs Only 25c

IN your home, for heating baby's milk during the night—in the sick room—nursery—for light ironing or heating curling irons—for preparing coffee and toast right at the breakfast table, cooking or broiling scores of tempting dishes—this new Sterno Single Burner Cook Stove, used with either the small or large size Sterno Canned Heat, is a convenience worth a hundred times its cost.

Made of sheet steel—handy, compact, folds flat as a pancake for traveling use and sets up in a jiffy as a strong, substantial cooking outfit. A great convenience when a man wants hot water quick for shaving. Ideal for business girls, at their rooms or office. Fine for soldering radio parts—a great help on trains—in hotels—in short, wherever and whenever instantaneous heat is what you want and need.

Every home can afford the Sterno Cook Stove if only for the sake of emergency. Your home should have it. Get one today.

The Clean, Convenient Fuel

STERNO CANNED HEAT

Sterno is manufactured under U.S. Gov't Permit for use only as a fuel.

We Want to Send You

"THE BARNSWALLOW'S" COOK BOOK

As a Get-Acquainted Offer

Mary Davis kept house in a barn—and out of her experience with Sterno, which "made cooking no problem at all," came this interesting and unusual cook book. It is crowded with practical recipes for deliciously appetizing dishes that can be made in a jiffy with Sterno Heat on a Sterno Stove, and gives ten days' specimen menus.

Simply Send Us The Coupon

—on the package enclosing the New Sterno Single Burner Cook Stove, and we will promptly mail you, free, "The Barnswallow's" Cook Book.

Or Send Us The Labels

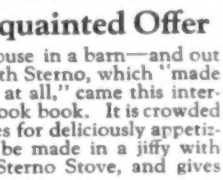
from three Sterno cans—mail before June 1st—and we will send you a copy.

If Your Dealer Hasn't The Stove

—send us your name and address with 25c (Canada 35c) and we will send you prepaid, one Sterno Single Burner Cook Stove, one can of Sterno Canned Heat, an Improved Sterno Extinguisher and Can Opener, and a copy of "The Barnswallow's" Cook Book. Act today and be able to enjoy the convenience of this cook stove in your home without delay.

Address MARY DAVIS
Domestic Science Department
STERNO CORPORATION
Box No. 545. 9 E. 37th St., New York, N.Y.

East of Rocky Mountains
Smallsize Canned Heat, 10c
Largesize Canned Heat, 25c
In the Far West
Smallsize Canned Heat, 2 for 25c
Largesize Canned Heat, 30c
In Canada
Smallsize Canned Heat, 15c
Largesize Canned Heat, 35c


No. 33

April, 1927
Vol. LVI No. 4

Everybody's

OSCAR GRAEVE
Editor

CONTENTS

SERIALS

The Smiling DeathPart I — *Francis D. Grierson* — 2
A modern mystery story of real people, not puppets.

Black Sheep's Gold Part III — *Beatrice Grimshaw* — 62
A romance of earth's darkest places.

Flying Kestrel Part IV — *Captain Dingle* — 136
Concluding this brutal saga of the sea.

NOVELETTES

Del Rio Peaches — *Millard Ward* — 44
Gun running with a dash of politics in Central America.

The Long Rider — *William Corcoran* — 94
The old romantic West and action aplenty.

SHORT STORIES

Strong Drink Is Raging — *Blatz Henderson* — 30
A highly humorous yarn of a private and a colonel.

Rabbit — *Neil McMillan* — 39
The story of a misfit among bad-men.

Two Strong Men — *Don Cameron Shafer* — 83
Brains versus brawn in the Amazon country.

The Two Mile Shoot — *Raoul Whitfield* — 128
An airplane story with a crashing climax.

Just to Add Interest — *Reginald Campbell* — 159
A wager regarding a Burmese tiger.

The Ship That Tried to Be Honest — *Frank H. Shaw* — 165
Sailors say ships have souls.

Everybody's Meeting Place — 173

The News of Next Month — 176

The painting on the cover by J. W. Schlaekjer
Headings by V. E. Pyles

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
JOSEPH A. MOORE, President LEVIN RANK, Secy. & Treas.
SPRING AND MACDOUGAL STREETS, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Entered as Second-Class Matter, August 16, 1899, at the Post-Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Brooklyn, New York. Yearly subscription, $2.50, in advance. Single copy, twenty-five cents. Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. No extra postage for Canada.
EVERYBODY'S takes all reasonable precautions for handling manuscripts submitted, but assumes no responsibility for their safety.
Copyright, 1927, by The Ridgway Company, in the United States and Great Britain. Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England.

WHO IS
LISTE

Nobody!

For a disease with an aristocratic name like Epithelial Debris, loose dandruff is certainly democratic. At some time in life nearly everyone learns about it first hand. It respects neither age nor sex.

The thing to do *whenever* it appears is to go right after it with Listerine, for this humiliating condition is a warning of more serious scalp trouble.

Listerine applied to the scalp will usually accomplish amazing results in checking loose dandruff.

Douse it on full strength and massage thoroughly. Be systematic about it. Keep it up every day for a week or two. Except in the most stubborn cases, you will see almost immediate improvement.

And unlike most dandruff treatments, Listerine is a real delight to use. It invigorates the scalp. It allays itching. It makes the head feel clean, refreshed and cool. Moreover it doesn't leave the hair brittle and gummy.

If you show any evidence of dandruff start with Listerine today. A week from now you will be glad you did. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, U. S. A.

London ∽ ∽ A Night of Fog A Smiling Man Found Dead within a Doorway

Everybody's Now Introduces to You a New Master of the Mystery Novel

FRANCIS D. GRIERSON

whose new serial, *The Smiling Death* Begins on the Next Page

FRANCIS D. GRIERSON has had books published in America before this—notably *The Limping Man*—but EVERYBODY'S is the first American magazine to publish his work serially.

And what, we ask you candidly, makes a better serial than an enthralling mystery story?

It is a far cry from Grierson's first published book to *The Smiling Death*. That first book, written while he was serving during the war, was *The A. B. C. of Military Law*.

Then followed varied experience on newspapers as reporter, sub-editor, and news editor.

Grierson was attracted to the writing of mystery tales because he conceived the idea of basing crimes and mysteries on actual scientific facts.

But you will not only find his work logical and scientific, you will, and still more important, find it intensely human. Here are no puppets but actual characters.

Best of all, it seems to us, is the villain—and you'll soon find out who he is. For in this story, differing in this way from the usual formula, the murderer is almost immediately revealed. The interest lies in securing the evidence. And that is interesting, aggravatingly interesting.

Let's start! *The Editor.*

Beginning the Last Word in Mystery Stories

The Smiling DEATH

By FRANCIS D. GRIERSON

FOG. And a really businesslike London fog can make even a Scottish mist look to its laurels.

The two young men framed in the brightly lighted entrance to a discreet night club in Tottenham Court Road peered into the obscurity outside and shivered a little.

The doorkeeper, resplendent—like the Assyrian cohorts—in purple and gold, shivered a little in polite sympathy.

"Very thick, gentlemen," he said. "Come on quite sudden, about an hour ago. Ten o'clock there wasn't 'ardly a sign of it; ten-fifteen you couldn't see across the road."

Peter Felle adjusted his opera hat at the angle of the moment, drew his white silk muffler about his throat, put on his gloves and remarked:

"Roger, a taxi is indicated, one thinks, does not one?"

The older man nodded, but the doorkeeper shook his head.

"Can't be done, sir," he said regretfully. "Tried to get one for another gentleman half an hour ago; rang up four ranks and went down to the corner of Oxford Street myself. All the taxis that don't go home get snapped up on a night like this."

Peter removed his cigaret from his lips, sent an accurate smoke-ring floating into the brown blanket outside, and turned to his friend.

"What are we going to do?" he asked.

"Walk," Roger responded, smiling.

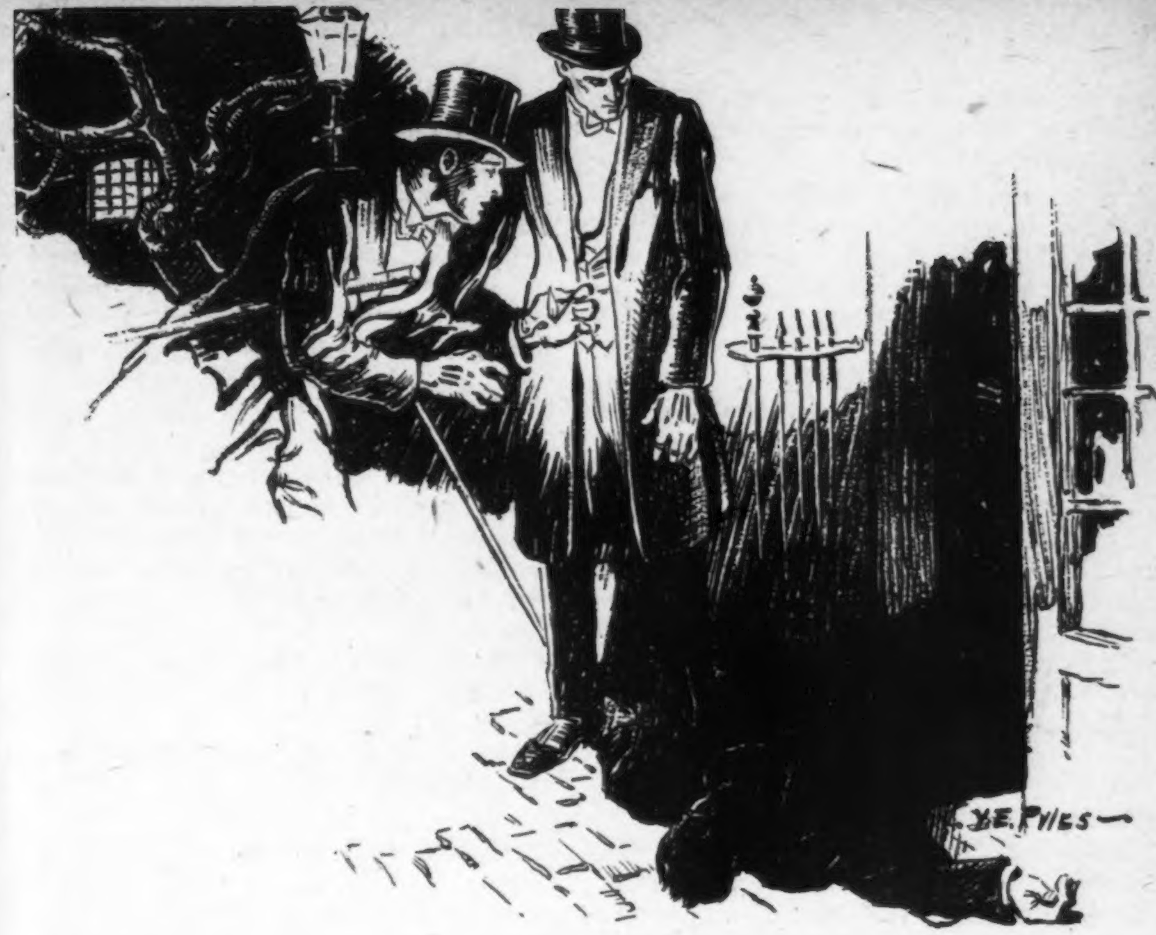
Peter turned up the collar of his overcoat. It was characteristic of both of them that neither proposed dragging out his own man by telephone and ordering his car at that hour.

The two friends stepped into the gloom, turned to the right, and began to make their way along the silent street.

"In point of fact," Peter resumed presently, "I rather like fogs. They're amusing. They make me feel like a buccaneer cruising in unknown seas, looking for his prey."

Roger Kent, always economical of words, nodded in reply.

"I remember once," Peter went on, but his reminiscence was lost to fame. Roger, laying his hand on his friend's arm, stopped, peering into the fog. A street lamp faintly illumined the spot where they stood, making the surrounding gloom darker by comparison.



Roger started forward as a dark object rose a few yards ahead, and as it flitted past Roger caught a glimpse of a girl's face, pale and horror-stricken, momentarily revealed in the light of the lamp. The next moment the girl had vanished into the fog.

Roger hesitated. That white, terrified face, appearing ghostlike out of the gloom, had given his steady nerves a shock, as though a cold hand had closed suddenly round his heart.

Pulling himself together, he stepped forward, only to stop short with a sharp exclamation. He had almost stumbled over a dim form huddled in a doorway.

Peter, who had followed his friend, struck a match, and in its flickering light Roger bent over the body of a middle-aged man.

"Drunk?" asked Peter coolly.

Roger did not reply for a few seconds. Then he rose and shook his head.

"Dead, I'm afraid," he said.

Peter's face grew grave.

"Shall I look for a policeman?" he asked.

Roger thought for a moment.

"No," he said. "You'd better nip up to the police station; it's only a short way beyond the club, on the same side. They'll have to send a stretcher."

Peter nodded and set off on his errand.

LEFT alone, Roger thrust his hands into the pockets of his overcoat, and stared thoughtfully down at the crumpled body at his feet. He was conscious of an odd sensation of uneasiness for which he could not account, and in his methodical way he took himself to task. Years in the mud and blood of the trenches in France and Flanders had familiarized him with death in much more ghastly forms than this, and the dead man was, after all, a complete stranger to him. But he could not dismiss from his mind the vision of that girl's face, so pale and terrified, and yet—he realised with a sudden thrill—so desirable. He had seen her only for a moment; nevertheless he recalled each feature as clearly as though he held her photograph in his hand.

Roger Kent was far from being an impressionable man. He had had many interests in life, but women had not been among them, and it was with an impatient shrug of his shoulders that he dismissed the girl's image from his mind and turned as the sound of fog-muffled footsteps came dully to his ears.

A couple of electric lamps made a circle of light into which stepped Peter, with a powerfully built man in evening dress and a police sergeant. Behind them a couple of constables stood impassively beside a wheeled ambulance.

"Hullo, Roger," said Peter. "This is Inspector Sims, who happened to be at the police station. Captain Kent," he added, turning to the man in evening dress.

Roger looked with interest at the man whose name he had more than once read in the newspapers, for Detective-Inspector Sims was one of the ablest officers at Scotland Yard. There was little of the traditional detective, he noted with vague surprise, about this irreproachably dressed fellow with the cheerful, almost innocent round face; except, perhaps, the broad shoulders, and the keen, observant eyes that met his in a shrewd glance.

Inspector Sims briefly acknowledged the introduction. Then, taking a lamp from the sergeant, he bent over the prostrate form. The bright beam revealed a man of middle age, dark-complexioned and of slight build. His clothes were English, but there was something about him that suggested the foreigner. Death had come to him easily enough, it seemed, for his features were composed and about the mouth were lines that, in the lantern's light, oddly reminded Roger of a man half smiling at some gracious dream.

Sims' examination did not last long. After a few moments he rose to his feet and gave a brief order to the sergeant. Then, turning to the two friends, he invited them to accompany him to the police station so that their evidence might be recorded. Without more ado he led the way up the street, and as Roger and Peter followed him the two constables carefully lifted the dead body and placed it on the ambulance.

A SHORT walk brought them to the police station, where the inspector led them into a room furnished like an office, in which a cheerful fire blazed and an elderly sergeant sat at a desk, writing with a grave deliberation which—with the bald patch on the top of his head—suggested a cloistered monk engaged in the illumination of a missal. This officer glanced up at them, placed his pen carefully on the inkstand, blotted an entry he had just made in a thick register, and rose.

"A shorthand writer," said Inspector Sims curtly, and the sergeant pressed a bell-button on his desk. "These gentlemen will tell us—" Sims was going on, when he stopped and regarded Captain Kent with surprise, for Roger was staring in amazement at a burly, grey-bearded man who lounged in an armchair by the fire, his feet on the mantelpiece and a large pipe in his mouth which he was smoking with every appearance of complete comfort and satisfaction. Like Inspector Sims, he was in evening dress, and an opera hat, an overcoat and a muffler lay on a bench near the window.

"Hullo, Uncle!" cried Roger, greatly astonished. "What the devil are *you* doing here?"

The big man's blue eyes twinkled behind his gold-rimmed spectacles as he blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"Hullo, Nephew!" he replied calmly. "Age commands respect; at least, it used to once upon a time; so suppose you tell me first what the devil *you* are doing here."

"I—that is, Peter and I—found a dead man," Roger explained.

"Well, why shouldn't I find one, too?" inquired the other. "You haven't taken out a patent for finding dead men, have you?"

Roger grinned uncertainly.

"Pull yourself together, my lad," the big man went on. "Just tell Inspector Sims exactly what happened, and I'm sure he'll do what he can for you. It's always best to make a clean breast of things."

Peter chuckled, and Roger was about to reply, when Inspector Sims held up his hand as the door opened and a young constable entered carrying a notebook and pencil, and seated himself near the sergeant's desk.

It was then duly recorded in the notebook how Captain Roger Kent, retired Army Officer, late of the Royal Regiment of Artillery and now residing with his mother, a widow, at Lancaster Gate, W., had discovered the body, apparently dead, of a man unknown to him, lying in the doorway of a shop in Tottenham Court Road, about eleven-thirty on the night in question.

It was further recorded that the Honorable Peter Felle, second son of the Earl of

Fellemere, also late of the Royal Regiment of Artillery and now residing in a flat in Dover Street, W., had been present when Captain Kent made his discovery, and had proceeded to the police station to obtain assistance while Captain Kent remained beside the body. The whole affair taking place during a fog of considerable density.

These and certain other matters having been recorded, the young constable retired to his adjoining lair to transcribe his notes and prepare neatly typewritten sheets for the signature of the witnesses.

ROGER, his first surprise over, behaved with his customary discretion and made no further reference to the presence of the grey-bearded man. Instead, he observed that it was a foul night.

Peter, who saw no reason why a gentleman compelled to visit a police station should be twitted with the fact, concurred, and offered Inspector Sims a cigaret.

Sims accepted with a smile.

"So you know Professor Wells?" he asked, turning to Roger.

The professor took the answer on himself.

"You will have noticed," he said, "that this young man addressed me as 'Uncle.' I am not his uncle. But because his father and I were friends, he presumes to regard himself as a sort of unofficial nephew of mine. I allow it, because he is less of a disgrace than some nephews might be."

"Well," Sims remarked, "I don't think we need keep your *un*-natural nephew and his friend any longer."

"If we can be of any use—?" interrupted Peter politely, but the detective shook his head.

"We may have to bother one of you to attend the inquest, but that will depend on the police surgeon's report and the coroner's decision. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile," Professor Wells put in, "I suppose I must make some show of hospitality, if only to keep these innocent youths out of the hands of evildoers. Come over to my house and have a drink."

He rose and picked up his muffler, but Inspector Sims laid a hand on his arm.

"Since we are here," he said easily, "I will just wait and have two words with the police surgeon. Perhaps you would care to wait, too; you medical fellows generally have something to say to one another. But no doubt Captain Kent knows the way to your house, and he and Mr. Felle might as well go ahead, instead of hanging about here. Are those statements ready, Sergeant?"

The young constable was just hammering out the last lines on his typewriter, and in a very few moments Roger and his friend had signed their respective documents and were making their way through the fog behind a reserve constable who obligingly led the way with his electric lamp in his hand.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said the Honorable Peter Felle, whose sprightly good-humor neither the fog nor the tragic discovery they had so recently made could repress. "Talk about the efficiency of the police force! The good Master Sims threw us out of his establishment with a degree of efficiency and despatch worthy of a battery sergeant-major handling a recruit."

"But rather more politely," Roger remarked.

"Oh yes; the polite insistence of a vacuum-cleaner," Peter agreed, as they turned into Russell Square and made their way toward the large, old-fashioned house in which Professor Wells had resided for many years.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS no wonder that Roger Kent had been surprised to find Professor Wells taking his ease in the charge-room of a police station as comfortably as though he had been in his own library. For the professor was a scientist of international fame, who could have written half the letters of the alphabet after his name if he had so desired. Wells was a man who made few public appearances; he preferred to let his books speak for him—books in which from time to time he recorded the results of researches which had placed him in the front rank of scientific investigators. On the rare occasions on which he could be persuaded to address one of the learned societies or to deliver a public lecture there was a rush for admission to the hall, for his clear, concise sentences and simple phraseology made his utterances as intelligible and interesting to the layman as to the expert.

There was, however, a side to the professor's character of which very few people were aware. At school he had formed a friendship with a boy named Merivale, and that association had grown with the passing years. Wells had studied medicine, and had practised as a doctor until a considerable legacy had set him free to devote himself to those studies of toxicology which had first brought him fame, and had led him on to abstruse researches in which psychological investigation had played no small part.

Charles Merivale, meanwhile, had entered the Civil Service, and developed a talent for logical reasoning which had marked him for distinction in the department of criminal investigation. His chance came when he was entrusted with a remarkable case the peculiar circumstances of which demanded the most delicate handling if grave international complications were to be avoided. Puzzled by certain features of the affair, Merivale bethought himself of Professor Wells, who had recently resigned a chair at a great university, finding his duties too onerous to permit him sufficient leisure for research. Merivale knew his friend's ability, and—what was even more important—his discretion, and brought his problem to Wells.

The professor was able to detect the use of an obscure poison and to indicate a certain line of investigation which Merivale followed with complete success. Merivale, his reputation made, was rewarded with a knighthood and the control of a special department of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard; but Wells, despite the entreaties of his friend, firmly refused to allow his name to appear in the matter. He preferred, he said, to be known to the public only as a scientist, and he pointed out that whatever assistance he might be able to give would be of much greater value so long as the criminal classes had no suspicion of his connection with the authorities—an argument the truth of which Merivale was compelled to admit.

The fact was that the professor had realised the subtle fascination of the study of crime and the criminal, a study for which his professional training in close observation and deduction peculiarly fitted him.

The case was the beginning of an association with Scotland Yard in which Wells had become one of the department's most trusted advisers, although the secret of his connection was known to as few people, even in official circles, as possible.

One of these was Inspector Sims, to whom Wells had taken a great liking. The inspector was a man of good family. Certain circumstances of a private and painful, though in no way derogatory, nature had caused him to join the police force under an assumed name, and he had set himself determinedly to mount the ladder of promotion. Merivale, who knew his story, had procured his transfer to the detective force, where he had quickly proved his worth. In a comparatively few years he had reached the rank of detective-inspector, and his chief would gladly have seen him occupy a higher post; but for private reasons, in which Merivale could not but acquiesce, Sims preferred to remain in a position in which the special trust reposed in him gave him greater privileges than many men of higher nominal rank enjoyed.

There was, therefore, little mystery in the appearance of Professor Wells at the police station, much as the discovery had surprised Roger Kent. Sims had been dining with the professor in Russell Square, and after dinner he had decided to call at the police station in Tottenham Court Road to make some inquiries of the local staff regarding a case in which he was interested. Wells, despite his remonstrances, had braved the damp fog and accompanied him, and they were about to return to Russell Square when Peter Felle made his appearance. Sims, who had already put on his hat and coat, strolled down the street with the men sent to fetch the body, leaving the professor chatting with the sergeant in the charge-room.

ROGER and his friend were not long alone. The professor and Sims soon arrived, and the four men settled themselves comfortably before a blazing fire in the library, with whisky and tobacco to aid their deliberations.

Wells filled a capacious meerschaum pipe, lit it and smoked industriously until it was drawing satisfactorily. Then he cocked a humorous eye at Roger Kent.

"Roger," he said, "since I do not appear to be drunk or disorderly, and have enough money to make pocket-picking unnecessary, you are naturally wondering why I should visit a police station in the dead of night."

Roger smiled.

"Not my business," he replied briefly.

"Exactly," Wells agreed. "And it is precisely because you are rather good at minding your own business that I propose to tell you certain things about other people's business. I have explained to Mr.

Sims that you are not altogether a fool, and from what you have told me before I am inclined to think that your friend Felle has also some slight pretensions to intelligence."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Peter gratefully, and Roger chuckled.

"Now, look here, you two," the professor went on, dropping his bantering manner, "I am going to make a suggestion to you; whether you agree to it or not is your own affair. But I want you to promise me that what I am going to say to you shall be kept an absolute secret until Sims or I release you. To be quite clear, I mean that you must not give the slightest hint to anybody—no matter what the circumstances may be—of what you hear now, or may hear later, regarding the matter in hand. Have I your promise?"

"Rather," said Peter quickly. Roger agreed more deliberately, and Wells was quick to observe and reply to the younger man's frown.

"Come, Roger," he said, "don't think me a theatrical old fool for requiring such an oath of secrecy. You know it is not that I do not trust you, but in this case—as you will see presently—I am responsible to other people for your discretion as well as my own, and I wish you to understand the gravity—"

Roger interrupted him.

"That's all right, sir," he said heartily. "I quite see. Please go ahead."

"Well then," the professor resumed, "here is the position: Inspector Sims—who, by the way, is an old friend of mine and for that reason has allowed me to take you into our confidence—Sims, I say, is very much interested in the case of that man you found dead in Tottenham Court Road tonight. Why he is so much interested he will tell you himself presently. As for me, you will probably be surprised to hear that I have been privately associated with Scotland Yard for some years. My knowledge of drugs has been useful once or twice. But it is important that as few people as possible should know that I act for the police in that way, so that's one of the things I want you to keep to yourselves. That's all I've got to say at present. Now Sims, it's your turn."

THE inspector took his cigar out of his mouth and looked thoughtfully at its feathery grey ash. Watching him, Roger thought he had never seen any one less like the conventional idea of a detective than this carefully groomed fellow in the well-cut dinner suit of a typical man about town. Sims, indeed, used to say that his completely commonplace, cheerful face was one of his greatest assets; his whole appearance was inconspicuously ordinary, and for that reason a great assistance to him in assuming varied disguises.

Inspector Sims sat in silence for a few moments, arranging his thoughts in his customary methodical way, and when he spoke it was with a pleasant twinkle in his eyes.

"I am afraid, Wells," he began, "that you and I are going to tumble from our high estate—I as a representative of the law and you as our adviser in deep and dark mysteries. Captain Kent and Mr. Felle probably expect us to sally forth armed with powerful lenses and automatic pistols, and snatch a murderer from his refuge in a Chinese opium den, after following his trail with a bloodhound. But I am afraid that when they see something of the blunders and mistakes one makes, they will lose that wholesome respect for the detective service which I hope is shared by most of the public."

Wells laughed.

"To hear you talk," he answered, "one would think you were a mental defective, instead of—well, I won't say what, for fear of making you conceited. But you know perfectly well that I am constantly amazed at your shrewdness—"

"And to hear you talk," the detective interrupted, laughing, "one would think you were a disciple sitting at my feet, instead of a wily old ruffian who constantly saves me from even worse blunders than those I do make. But if we go on like this, your friends will think we belong to a mutual admiration society. To come to the matter in hand, then," he went on, addressing the two young men, "the fact is that, as Wells has told you, I am a good deal interested in the man you found tonight. Mind you, I may be quite wrong in my suspicions, but that is a risk we have to take every day. If we only acted on certainties, we should do very little. Now, it was you, Captain Kent, who first discovered the body, I think?"

"Yes," Roger agreed.

"You were watching when I flashed the light on the man's face; you have seen a good many dead men, I believe—did you notice the expression on the face?"

"Very peaceful," said Roger thoughtfully.

"Quite so."

"Smiling," Roger added.

"Smiling. Exactly," the detective agreed. He put his hand into a pocket and took out a notebook, the leaves of which he turned for a moment or two.

"You may be interested to hear," he resumed, "that this is not the first time we have come across a dead body with that smiling appearance. The professor will tell you that such a contraction of the muscles of the face is not always difficult to explain. Strychnine poisoning, for example, produces a repulsive grin known as the *risus sardonicus*, but it is also accompanied by severe physical spasms in which the limbs are terribly distorted, and the back-bone arched until the heels almost meet the back of the head. However, we can go into that later on."

HE GLANCED at his notes, and went on. "At Scotland Yard we have a way of identifying cases or series of events by some simple phrase which sticks easily in the memory. I mention the fact because I am wondering whether this is another case of what we call 'The Smiling Death.' In 1908 a woman was found dead in Hyde Park. On her face was that peculiar half-smile. Death was attributed to heart failure. The next case of which I have a note was in 1909, a man this time, found dead in the doorway of a shop in Regent Street late at night. Verdict, death from heart failure. In 1911 there was another case, and another in 1912. The next case was in 1919 and there was another in 1923. In each case the same verdict was returned. Of course, I am only giving you a brief outline to save time; I have full reports at the Yard. The point is that in each case the victim was a man or a woman of considerable wealth, or the heir to a fortune. Frankly, 'The Smiling Death' has begun to get on my nerves a little. We made a good many enquiries, and were not altogether satisfied with the results, but I must confess that we could find nothing to base the slenderest case on. But somehow I am uneasy about the affair, and if we can connect this latest discovery with the previous deaths we may find out something interesting.

"Now, you are no doubt wondering why I have told you all this. In the first place, we thought it better to tell you of the professor's association with Scotland Yard. It is a secret known to very few people, as he has said, and it is important that it should not be suspected. He has not told you that we look on him as one of our most valuable unofficial advisers, and I am always delighted when I can get him to help me with my cases. In the second place, Wells has suggested to me that it might be convenient to make use of your help, if you care to give it, and if a certain theory we have formed should prove worth following up.

"You see, you are both civilians and no one would suspect you of helping us, and it is just possible that you may be of considerable use. But it is only fair to tell you that we may simply waste your time and arrive at no satisfactory result; and on the other hand it is always possible that you might find yourselves in some personal danger. There's the position: it is for you to say whether you are interested or not."

The detective spoke almost as casually as though he were suggesting a luncheon party or a game of golf, but in truth both he and the professor watched the result of his suggestion with a degree of attention keener than the two younger men realized.

They would have been an interesting group for the study of a physiognomist, those four men, as they sat before the cheerful fire. The professor, sprawling his long limbs over a deep chair, somehow suggested a shaggy mastiff, good-tempered enough, but not to be angered with impunity. Sims, with his well-brushed hair a little touched with gray, and his cheerful round face on which the years had stamped but few lines, looked the picture of a comfortable soul possessed of sufficiently ample means to follow the world's sunshine wherever it shone; but a shrewd observer might have marked a certain alert expression in the eyes, the hint of a capable grasp in the broad, strong hands, a controlled decision in every gesture.

Roger Kent, still in the early thirties, had that indefinably "seasoned" air that stamped those who successfully bore even a little authority in the Great War. He had been at "The Shop," learning the mysteries of trajectories and time-fuses, when mobilization galvanized the Army into a sudden intensity of life. Cadets at Sandhurst were hurried through their final courses, and sent off to the cavalry or the infantry.

At Woolwich, Roger fretted internally, but applied himself to his work with a quiet determination that satisfied instructors only too anxious to send the artillery the fresh blood it was soon to need so badly. Roger took his finals, joined a brigade of field guns, and went out to France with a second-lieutenant's single star on his shoulder before the war had run much more than the six months' span originally allotted to it by the wiseacres.

Three years of danger and discomfort brought many things to Roger: a Military Cross and bar, to prove that his service had not been in vain; steel muscles and an alert brain; a habit of self-reliance, and a knowledge of men not to be learned from books.

Like all good soldiers, Roger had his ambitions, but he was no place-seeker, and he was too good an officer to be voluntarily relinquished by his brigadier, who consequently did not expatiate on his virtues in the hearing of the general staff.

So it came about that he had only held the command of a battery, with the acting rank of major, for a month when a fragment of the casing of a German shell lodged in his left eye. At the casualty clearing station the doctor shook his head, and Roger journeyed to the base and then to London, where a famous specialist told him bluntly that he was lucky to be alive at all, and fitted a glass eye into the cavity.

Roger's firm mouth grew a little firmer; never talkative, he grew a little more silent; but he purchased a monocle cunningly made with the faintest gray tint, almost imperceptible but sufficient to soften the hard, glassy stare of the artificial eye, and cheerfully accepted the artillery instructorship he was offered, doing his best to teach the young fellows who passed through his hands a broader conception of soldiering than is comprehended in a knowledge of rifling and range-finders.

OF THESE youngsters was Peter Felle, fresh from the Officers' Training Corps and filled with warlike enthusiasm. Roger, older by centuries in experience though but half a decade or so of years, liked the lad. To Peter, the older man stood for all that, beneath the casual flippancy he affected, his clean young mind held to be worthy of his simple creed. In due time Peter departed to France, and there Roger, given a fortnight's "refresher" within the advanced zone, saw that his pupil had learned his lesson well. Their friendship, begun in war, endured in peace. Roger, his military career cut short, was too good a sportsman to whine. Doffing his khaki when the Armistice bells announced that physical warfare was to be replaced by the murder of competitive commerce, Roger returned to his mother's house.

That sensible woman, grateful for his safety even though it had meant the sacrifice of his ambitions, attempted no overt consolation, content to let time apply its own anodyne. Roger, always a lover of the printed word, found himself with ample leisure in which to indulge a taste for which his military studies and duties had left him few opportunities. Books, books and yet more books began to arrive at Lancaster Gate, and Roger learned the sacred thrill of the collector who finds in a shabby second-hand shop a copy of "Paul and Virginia," with steel engravings, marked "Very interesting: 6d." He knew, it is true, almost nothing of the value of first editions; but he cared less. His books, on all subjects and of any date, he chose for love, not profit; and he could find a given volume on his shelves by touch, without having to switch on the light.

Peter, to whom everything that Roger did was right, often accompanied him on his wanderings through mean streets, waiting in patient silence while his friend blackened his fingers with dusty volumes, or pounced eagerly on some dilapidated treasure lurking at the bottom of the "All these, 4d" box.

In return, Roger assumed at intervals the tail-coat and white tie of ceremony, or the dinner-jacket of *camaraderie*, and allowed Peter to lead him to the land of jazz and bubbly.

Thus it was that the two friends had found themselves in Tottenham Court Road on this fog-shrouded night and had made a discovery which was to lead them into an adventure stranger than many of the detective stories which Roger had read with chuckling disbelief.

THE professor and the detective waited impassively while Roger considered their suggestion with characteristic thoroughness. Peter, though unable to conceal his eagerness, remained silent, with the faith of a subaltern awaiting the orders of his battery-commander.

At last Roger, having regarded the matter from every possible angle, replied briefly:

"Very glad to help, if I can be of use."

Inspector Sims glanced at the clock.

"Now, I don't think there is anything more to be said at the moment. We will let you know if and when you can help us, and I am sure you won't forget the importance of saying nothing to any one about the affair."

He had half risen when, to his surprise, Roger stopped him with a gesture.

"I've something to say," said Roger.

"Let's hear it," replied the detective with equal brevity. He had already realized that this young man wasted few words.

Roger stared thoughtfully into the fire for a moment.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "that I should have mentioned it if you hadn't asked us to help you. It wasn't my business then, but I suppose it is now. Just before I found the man's body I saw—a girl. She ran past me into the fog."

"Can you describe her?" asked Sims, after a pause.

"I only caught a glimpse of her. But she looked frightened—terrified," Roger replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"No wonder, if she'd stumbled over the corpse," Peter remarked. "Funny I didn't notice her."

"You were nearer the edge of the pavement and didn't happen to be looking toward my side," Roger explained.

"She looked frightened," Sims remarked thoughtfully. "As Felle says, that would be natural if she had seen the man's body."

Roger nodded, and the detective eyed him keenly.

"You think she was more than ordinarily startled?" he asked.

Roger nodded again.

"I have never seen such terror," he said simply.

"Odd that she did not stop and ask for your help," remarked the professor innocently.

Roger met his gaze squarely.

"You probably think she may have had something to do with the man's death," he said. "It's natural you should. But she didn't look to me like—like a criminal."

Inspector Sims looked quickly at him, and then at the professor.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "it's worth bearing in mind, and I'm glad you mentioned it, though it's a hundred to one that the girl was simply shocked at seeing the body, and wanted to get away from it as quickly as possible. Anyhow, it's late, and we ought to be in bed. I'll let you fellows know how things go on."

So they parted and went their several ways, Roger reflecting on the surprise which the evening had brought him. But he would have been amazed had anybody told him a certain thing which he was far from suspecting: that he had fallen in love with a girl's face, pale and horror stricken, momentarily revealed in the light of a street-lamp.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Roger Kent came down to breakfast next morning it was to find the world visible once more. A brisk breeze had swept away the gray blanket of fog, and the footsteps of pedestrians, hurrying to keep their blood warm, sounded crisply through the keen air.

Roger added milk and sugar to his porridge in the approved proportions, and devoured the mixture before unfolding *The Daily Mail* and propping it against the coffee-pot from which Fong had already filled his cup. Settling to his kidneys and bacon, Roger began to skim the news, but it was not until he had arrived at the marmalade stage that he noticed a small paragraph describing the discovery of the body of a dead man in Tottenham Court Road on the previous night. He observed with some satisfaction that the police had tactfully refrained from mentioning either his name or that of Peter Felle, but they had given as full a description as possible of the dead man's appearance and clothing, no doubt with the object of attracting the attention of somebody who could identify him.

For some minutes Roger sat in a brown study. It was not, however, of that body huddled in the doorway that he was thinking, but of a pale, terrified face slipping silently past him like a phantom in the fog.

He was too honest with himself not to admit he had no real reason for believing either that the girl was concerned or was unconcerned in the man's death; for all he knew, the one was as likely as the other. It was for that reason that he had spoken of her to Inspector Sims on the previous night: he had recognized it as his duty to tell the detective all he knew of the matter, but he had felt a queer reluctance in doing so. However, Roger had never been accustomed to avoid a duty merely because it happened to be distasteful.

In all probability, he told himself, some perfectly simple explanation of the man's death would be found, despite Sims' owlish wisdom and mysterious hints; and as for the girl, they would simply never see her again. Yet, he confessed, Sims was not really a fool, nor had he pretended to any great wisdom. Perhaps, after all, there was something queer about the affair? In that case, the girl might—

"Oh, hell!" said Roger impatiently.

He rose, filled his pipe and lighted it, and stared out of the window for a few moments. Then he rang the bell.

"Fong," he said, as his devoted Chinese servant slipped into the room. "I'm going to wander round a bit. If Mr. Felle rings up, tell him I may be out all day, but I'll ring up here about one o'clock in case there's any message."

He was about to leave the room when a thought struck him.

"If anybody else should ring up," he added, "take the message, and say you'll tell me when I come back."

Fong nodded.

"You investigate book merchants?" he asked. Fong's English was peculiar to himself. He was immensely proud of the fact that he had overcome his racial difficulty with the "r" and "l"; he said "very" instead of "velly," and never said "glet" for "get."

But he had a passion for long, sonorous words, which he used in odd combinations that Peter Felle said reminded him of a man trying to solve a cross-word puzzle without a dictionary.

Roger signified that book merchants were, in truth, his objective, whereupon Fong silently produced an overcoat with big side pockets, into one of which he slipped a leather handle fitted with two long book straps.

ROGER'S knowledge of London was becoming, like that of *Sam Weller*, extensive and peculiar; but whereas *Mr. Pickwick's* servant was most intimately acquainted with public houses, Roger drew his mental map in printer's ink. His usual plan was to select a given starting point, and beat the neighborhood. Marble Arch, for example, meant the aristocratic establishments of Oxford Street and Piccadilly, where first editions hobnobbed with the new publications. Charing Cross Road meant a contrast in prices, according to the shop, with an eye to be kept on St. Martin's Lane and on the French shops in Soho and Green Street. A city day began with an hour's picking (with gloved hands) at the barrows in Farringdon Street; up Ludgate Hill, half an hour in Paternoster Row, a peep into Cripplegate and another at Gracechurch Street, and a general prying into as many narrow streets as time permitted.

From Westminster Bridge one descended on the South side of the river, the first visit, of course, being to the dark cavern crammed with dusty books under the shadow of the County Hall. *Much treasure here*, was marked on Roger's mental map. The New Cut followed, and then Blackfriars Road and its neighborhood. The Caledonian Market claimed a full Friday to itself, with a lunch of ham sandwiches, fresh doughnuts and tea at the coffee-stall where a jolly red-faced father and son passed the time of day with everybody, as the father had done for more than a score of years. Bayswater, Kilburn, Praed Street—Roger could almost have found his way blindfolded from shop to shop.

Today he hesitated a moment before deciding on his choice of the hunting grounds spread before him. Why not try the Marylebone district, he asked himself? It was almost new ground to him, and should be rich in possibilities. With a grin at his own hypocrisy, he admitted that Marylebone meant for him a tramp up and down and round about Tottenham Court Road and the network of streets about it, in the hope of encountering again a certain pale face. It was, of course, ridiculous to suppose that he would meet one particular person in all London's millions. And if he did meet her, what then? One does not approach a complete stranger with lifted hat and a suave—"Good morning! I think I met you last night beside that fellow's dead body in the fog, didn't I?"

"Damn!" said Roger; but he put on the overcoat Fong held ready for him, took his hat, gloves and stick, and walked briskly along the Bayswater Road to the Marble Arch, telling himself that there was no reason why he should not choose the West Central district in preference to any other.

The London General Omnibus Company conveyed him along Oxford Street as rapidly as the traffic constables permitted, and, dropping off the omnibus as it stopped in a block of vehicles near Frascati's, he turned up Tottenham Court Road, keeping a sharp lookout for Professor Wells. He was not anxious to meet that scientist's shrewd eyes at the moment.

He slackened his pace as he passed the doorway in which he had found the dead man, and presently crossed the road before he reached the police station, pretending as profound an interest in the windows of the furniture shops as though he proposed to set up one of the delightful, compact and cosy homes for which those establishments cater so completely.

ARRIVED at the busy crossroads where countless taxicabs pass, carrying impatient travelers to the great railway termini, Roger hesitated. For perhaps half an hour he beat the neighborhood—no longer with much hope of seeing a certain girl's face, but in his customary search for bookshops. A few of these he found and visited, but with disappointing results, and presently found himself back at the crossroads again. Then, turning to the left, he made his way leisurely along the Euston Road, where at first it seemed to him that all the manufacturers and sellers of motor-cars and their accessories had gathered from the four quarters of the earth. But as he came in sight of the underground railway station at the junction of Great Portland Street, he saw on a window the magic word *BOOKS* and his collector's heart leaped within him, for here was a shop of more promising aspect than any he had yet seen that morning.

The window fronted what had apparently been a fair-sized private house, now converted into a book shop. The outside of the building was painted a respectable gray, and a brightly polished brass plate running below the length of the window bore the name *GREGORY MARLE* in letters of plain type.

The window was filled with books marked at varying prices, but there were no enticing legends of the kind beloved by many dealers: "*Very Cheap*"; "*Amazing Bargain*"; and so forth.

The window took up almost the whole frontage, leaving only room for a narrow, swinging door, half wood and half frosted glass.

The place had an oddly dignified and restful air, set as it was amid neighbors whose interests lay in a more strenuous walk—or rush—of life. Roger thankfully thrust out of his mind the events of the previous night and prepared to spend a delightful hour among the volumes shelved and tabled inside. Opening the door, which an automatic piston closed behind him with appropriate gentleness, he entered the shop. It was a roomy place; two or three tables stood in the center, and there were a few comfortable leather chairs whose well worn look showed that the customers of the establishment were not afraid to examine the books at their leisure. There was a pleasantly inviting look about those chairs. Roger looked about him with that defensive air which becomes almost an instinct with the collector. But no ingratiating young man, or simpering young woman advanced with a "Can I help you, sir?"

A young man there was, indeed, but he took no more notice of Roger than a casual glance as the door opened. He sat at a little desk in the corner, correcting the proofs of a printed catalog. A cheerful young man, about twenty-five, dressed in a rather worn brown lounge suit, but his collar was clean; and his hands, though inky in places, were not uncared for.

Roger smiled to himself. This, his experience told him, was the sort of place wherein one might wander from shelf to shelf, fingering a book here and there, without fear of interruption. The volumes, he noted, were well arranged on a definite plan; fiction here, travel there, history, politics, *belles lettres*—each in its appointed place. At the back of the shop there was a doorless opening, above which was a painted notice:

Foreign Sections, 1st Floor.

Miscellaneous, 2nd Floor.

Office, 3rd Floor.

Methodically Roger began to make the round of the shelves. Coming presently to the little desk, he caught the young man's eye and nodded politely.

"Morning," he said.

"Morning," replied the other, returning his smile.

"Got some nice stuff here," Roger went on.

The young man permitted himself a critical glance at the shelves.

"Pretty good," he admitted modestly. "More upstairs, if you care to go up."

"Thanks," said Roger.

"If there's anything you particularly want—" the young man began, and left it at that.

"No, I don't think so," answered Roger vaguely.

"Most people prefer to scout round for themselves," remarked the young man. "But if I can do anything. . . or Mr. Marle. . . ."

He motioned toward a speaking-tube labeled *Office* that hung beside his chair.

"Don't want to bother you," said the young man thoughtfully.

"Thanks awfully, Mr.—" hesitated Roger, perceiving that this was not the ordinary assistant.

"Foster," said the young man.

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Foster," Roger repeated. "I'm scouting round, as you said."

Mr. Foster nodded, smiled, and took up his pen without more ado.

AS ROGER passed on to the next shelf the door opened and an elderly spectacled man entered, to whom Foster gave friendly greeting.

"We've got the book you wanted," he said. "Mr. Marle wants to talk to you about it. I'll call him."

He blew sharply into the speaking tube, and then spoke.

"Mr. Selby is here, Mr. Marle," he said, and clapped the tube to his ear.

"Mr. Marle is coming down, Mr. Selby," he said.

Presently there was a deliberate tread on the stairs, and through the opening at the back of the shop came Mr. Gregory Marle.

Looking discreetly over the top of the book he had taken from a shelf, Roger saw a man about sixty years of age. He was very tall, but stooped a little. His forehead was high and partly bald; beneath it gray eyebrows overhung piercing black eyes. His nose was long and straight, his ears pointed. He wore a well made but rather old-fashioned suit of gray material, loosely cut; about his old-fashioned collar was a black tie that went round twice and was fastened in front in a large bow. A pair of pince-nez dangled from a black ribbon, and in his left hand he carried a silver snuff box.

"Good morning, Mr. Selby," he said courteously. "I was fortunate enough to secure the book for you at a more reasonable price than I had expected—five guineas, in fact."

"Excellent, excellent," said Mr. Selby, rubbing his hands. "You are a wonder—a veritable wonder. I believe you know every book that was ever printed, Mr. Marle!"

The book seller waved his hand deprecatingly.

"Why, not quite, I fear," he replied, obviously pleased by the compliment. "But I have been in the trade for many years, you know, and one picks up a good deal of odd information. But about your book: I was about to send it to you, but since you have come in I can give it to you at once. Foster, please ask Miss Fayne—or, never mind: you are busy with that catalog."

He took up the speaking tube.

"Pamela," he said, "Mr. Selby is here: would you let me have that book that came in for him last night?"

Putting down the tube, he tapped his box and took snuff very delicately, after offering it to his customer, who declined with a laugh.

"A bad habit, and out of date," Mr. Marle confessed, in his cool, unemotional tones; "but I am afraid many of my habits are old fashioned, and probably bad, too."

He broke off as a girl came into the shop, carrying a book in her hand. She was dressed in a plain blue coat frock that hinted at the graceful lines of her slim figure. Her brown hair was bobbed, and brown eyes looked out of an oval face. Her skin was creamy as old ivory, but beneath it a faint color glowed.

Roger, clutching his book in tense fingers, caught his breath. Here, in this peaceful bookshop, was the girl who had slipped past him, terror-stricken, in the fog.

CHAPTER IV

ROGER, amazed at his own excitement, walked rapidly down Great Portland Street, turned into Oxford Street and made his way to Frascati's. Entering the restaurant, he deposited his hat and coat in the cloak room and then found a small table in a quiet part of the balcony. Choosing some dishes almost at haphazard from the menu, he ordered a cocktail and drank it at a draft.

Then he took himself seriously to task.

Why, he mentally demanded, should the discovery that the girl he had seen in the fog was employed in a bookshop cause him such surprise? After all, she had to exist somewhere, and why not in a bookshop as well as anywhere else? Why, indeed, should he be interested in her at all?

Unaware of his waiter's reproachful eye, he allowed his food to cool on the plate before him as he reviewed the events of the morning. Pamela. So that was her name. Pamela Fayne. He liked the sound of it. Pamela—it went well with brown eyes and hair and a slim figure. A pleasant, musical voice, too; for he had heard her speak to Mr. Selby before he had had the presence of mind to mumble something to young Foster about coming back another day, and to make his escape. Why, exactly, he should have bolted like a coursed hare he could hardly have said. There was no fear that the girl would recognize him, he saw, for as she passed him her eyes had met his for a moment, and hers had held no gleam of recognition. And if she had recognized him, what could it have mattered? He had nothing to be ashamed of. Nor had she for that matter. Of that he was convinced. Any girl would be terrified if she stumbled on a dead man in such circumstances.

Frowning, he drummed on the tablecloth with impatient fingers. Then, coming to a sudden decision, he doggedly attacked his lunch.

The meal despatched, he retrieved his garments and allowed the gorgeous hall-porter to hail a taxicab for him, in which he drove to Whitehall. Dismissing the cab, he turned into New Scotland Yard and asked a polite policeman where he could find Inspector Sims. The constable, betraying a certain alertness at the mention of the detective's name, hinted that the inspector was a busy person and saw people only by appointment. If the gentleman had a card about him—

The gentleman had a card about him, and produced it. After a moment's hesitation he penciled on it the single word "News," and handed it to the constable, who passed it on to a colleague, who disappeared into the mysterious recesses of the building.

Roger, awaiting the man's return, made a futile attempt to appear at ease, but he could not escape an absurd impression that everybody who passed was mentally classifying him as a swell pickpocket or a confidence man. In this, however, he was unduly conceited; no experienced police officer would have rated him so highly.

IN A few minutes the messenger returned and invited Roger to follow him. Roger's military training had included a reasonable knowledge of the art of map-reading, but as he followed his guide through a network of tortuous passages he lost all sense of direction, and whimsically reflected that if the guide should disappear, he might wander in this miniature labyrinth until an exploring party found him, or he died of hunger and exhaustion.

At length, however, the man stopped and knocked at a door, and Roger recognized the voice that bade them enter.

"Good morning," said Inspector Sims, rising from the table at which he had been sitting, and shaking Roger's hand. "There's somebody you know here."

Roger had already observed the sprawling form of Professor Wells—much too big for that tiny cupboard of a room—distributed over a worn leather armchair.

"Hullo, Roger! How goes it, my lad?" asked the professor cheerily.

Roger replied that it went reasonably well, and accepted the cigaret Sims offered, but forgot to light it until that officer struck a match for him.

The inspector's eyes met those of the professor for the briefest possible space, but they held nothing but friendly welcome as he turned to Kent.

"Rather fortunate your turning up this morning," he said. "Wells happened to look in, and we were just talking about the Tottenham Court Road affair."

Roger nodded.

"I gathered from the message on your

card that you had got hold of some information," the detective hinted.

Roger nodded again.

"Don't know if it's of much importance," he said, with an effort that annoyed him. "Thought you ought to know, anyhow, so I blew in."

"Quite right," said Sims encouragingly.

"I saw that girl this morning," he said.

"You mean the girl you saw in Tottenham Court Road just before you found the body?" asked Sims.

"Yes," Roger replied. "I thought I ought to tell you."

"Quite right," answered the detective, his features as devoid of expression as those of a Chinese idol. "One never knows what may be useful."

"Not that I imagine—" began Roger, and stopped.

"Quite," Sims agreed, courteously vague. "Where did you see her?"

"I'd better tell you the whole thing," said the younger man.

"Well, that's interesting," he said thoughtfully, when Roger had finished. "You may be surprised to hear that I am expecting Mr. Gregory Marle here in a few minutes."

"Marle?" said Roger, greatly surprised. "What has he got to do with it?"

"Very little, apparently," replied Sims frankly. "But he called at the police station in Tottenham Court Road this morning and made a statement about the dead man. They telephoned to me about it, and I arranged for him to come along this afternoon."

"Why not this morning?" asked Roger, and the detective smiled.

"This afternoon was more convenient," he explained.

Roger reflected.

"You mean you wanted to find out whether he was telling the truth?" he suggested shrewdly.

"My dear Kent," said Sims plainly, "in our job we can not afford to take things on trust. As a matter of fact, from enquiries we have made I fancy this Mr. Marle is quite a decent old fellow."

"You haven't had much time to find out," Roger remarked, and the professor chuckled.

"You don't know Sims," he said.

Just then the telephone on the inspector's desk rang.

Sims took up the receiver, spoke briefly, and replaced it.

"Mr. Marle has arrived," he said.

"I'd better push off," said Roger, rising to his feet, but Sims waved him back to his chair.

"By no means," he said. "Marle has come here of his own free will: I mean, he is not, so far as we have any reason to believe, a criminal. There is no reason why he should not meet you—indeed, as he may have noticed you in the shop this morning, and you will probably meet him again, it is just as well that he should know that you are interested in the matter."

HE BROKE off as a knock sounded on the door, and they all rose as a clerk ushered in the tall figure of Mr. Gregory Marle.

The old bookseller was dressed as Roger had seen him that morning, and carried a broad-brimmed hat of black felt and a slender, crutch-handled stick of ebony.

"How do you do, Mr. Marle?" said Sims. "I am Inspector Sims. It is very kind of you to come and help us in this way."

The bookseller bowed with grave courtesy.

"I shall be very happy if it is in my power to be of service to you," he answered. "But, really, as I told the officials at the police station, I have very little to say. I am afraid," he added, with a smile that held something of almost childlike simplicity, "that all this is rather outside my world."

"Of course, of course," Sims agreed heartily. "But let me present these gentlemen. It was Captain Kent, here, who actually found the body of the dead man last night, and this is his friend, Professor Wells, with whom he spent part of the evening."

The bookseller bowed, and looked with interest at the professor.

"Have I," he began, "the honor of speaking to the author of —"

But Wells lifted a hand in protest.

"Please," he begged, and the old man smiled.

"My shelves are no strangers to your writings, sir," he said. "I have ventured to study your pages with some care, and not without profit. Unhappily my lack of scientific knowledge has prevented me from grasping everything, nevertheless I have been intensely interested in your researches."

Mr. Marle spoke with a grave sincerity beyond conventional flattery, and Wells inclined his head in acknowledgment.

Sims put the bookseller into the armchair and suggested tobacco, but Mr. Marle shook his head.

"I like the scent, but I prefer to enjoy it by proxy," he explained. "I confess to another vice, however," and drawing out his silver snuff-box, he tapped and offered it. Sims took a pinch, with the air of a man accustomed to be all things to all men, but the others declined.

"And now, Mr. Marle," said the inspector, "if you will be kind enough to repeat the statement you made at the local police station this morning, I shall be obliged, for I have not yet told Professor Wells and Captain Kent about your theory."

The bookseller waved a deprecating hand.

"I would not venture to call it a theory," he said diffidently. "It is for such experts as yourself to build your theories on the scraps of knowledge we laymen come by. In this case, indeed," he added frankly, "I wish that it had fallen to the lot of any one rather than myself to come to you. But I am old fashioned enough to hold some regard for the duties of citizenship."

He paused, and Sims nodded sympathetically.

"I understand," he said. "Your statement to the police at Tottenham Court Road showed that your task was a painful one, and we are all the more obliged to you for coming forward so promptly."

Mr. Marle bowed, and passed his hand across his brow with a somewhat weary gesture.

"It is, indeed, hard to be forced to suspect a person in whom one has placed some degree of confidence. I had thought that in my little shop I was not likely to be drawn into the affairs of a world which I realize has passed me by. However," he added, smiling faintly, "you must forgive me. I am not as young as I was, and they say that the old grow garrulous without knowing it. I will try to tell what little I know as briefly as may be."

HE PAUSED, tapped his snuff-box and took a pinch.

"When I opened my newspaper this morning and read of the discovery of the dead body, I did not at first realize its peculiar interest to my little circle. But on reading the description a second time, I was forced to the conclusion that the dead man was known to me. That conclusion, unhappily, proved to be only too correct, as I learned at the police station, where the officer in charge took me to see the body. As I told him, the man was Señor Manuel Garcia, a native, I think, of one of the Central or Southern American States."

"He was a friend of yours, I believe?" Sims suggested, but Mr. Marle shook his head.

"I fear I can not go so far as that," he replied. "I had known him for a considerable time, and I confess that we had a common bond of interest in our love of books. Señor Garica, indeed, was a singularly well-informed man, and I recall many conversations in which I was impressed by his oddly diverse knowledge. But there was another side to his character which was less pleasant—a certain callous disregard of human emotions, if I may so express myself, which grated on me. It may be that I am unduly sensitive, but I like to think that humanity is not as cruel as some would have us believe. Señor Garcia seemed to have a little pity for those less fortunate than himself."

"For instance?" hinted Sims, who had listened with deep interest.

Mr. Marle hesitated.

"It is difficult to recall specific instances," he explained. "His attitude toward the poor, for example, was broadly that if they had failed in the race of life it was their own fault, and they deserve neither sympathy nor help. I remember, too, a sneering reference to what he termed the folly of those who had 'risked their skins,' as he put it, by volunteering for service in the late war. I am not, as a rule, a quarrelsome man, but I remember that I resented his words and took up the cudgels somewhat strongly. He apologized gracefully enough for having unwittingly offended what he described as my natural pride of race, and the matter dropped. But the incident made an unpleasant impression on my mind."

"I do not wonder," Sims remarked.

"I must not, however, make too much of the affair," continued the bookseller, in his precise way. "My relations with Señor Garcia were, until quite recently, those of a bookseller with a client valued both for his substantial orders and his appreciation of the wares it is my business to sell."

"Then, I think, a more serious incident occurred?"

"YES. Serious, at least, in a personal sense. A couple of days ago my assistant, a young man named Gerald Foster, resented Señor Garcia's manner to my ward, Pamela Fayne, who assists me in my work. It appears that Garcia, who had necessarily met my ward fairly frequently when he came to the shop, had become attracted by her. He did not mention the matter to me, probably fearing that I might object—as, in truth, I should have done, for I could not have considered him a suitable husband for her. As a matter of fact, however, I was too deeply immersed in my books to see what was going on, a negligence for which I now blame myself bitterly. It appears that Garcia repeatedly asked the girl to meet him at various places, which she invariably refused to do.

"She did not speak to me about it, I gather, because—as she always does—she desired to spare me annoyance. Indeed, Pamela and young Foster between them contrive to set me free from many of the purely routine duties and worries inseparable from my business. Unfortunately, as I am told, Garcia encountered Pamela alone in the shop during my absence and went so far as to attempt to caress her. But at that moment Foster came down-stairs from the office, saw what was going on, and ordered Garcia to leave at once. Garcia retorted offensively that Foster should remember that he was a mere hired servant, whereupon Foster (as he frankly admits) ejected Garcia, using considerable violence in doing so.

"If the matter had ended there, I should have said little, beyond rebuking Foster for taking on himself a responsibility that was properly mine. But unhappily it appears that last night, about seven o'clock, there was another encounter between them. Pamela had gone out to visit some girl friends, and when near the underground railway station at Tottenham Court Road she met Garcia, who insisted on speaking to her, and followed her down a side-street into which she turned to avoid him. Then Foster, who had apparently followed her secretly, appeared and knocked Garcia down, at the same time using grave threats. There was no one else about, Pamela says, and Garcia picked himself up and slunk off, but not before he had told Foster that he would make him pay for the insult. Pamela then went to her friends, and Foster went about his business.

"Now, gentlemen, I have told you all I know. Deeply as I regret it, I am forced to the conclusion that the unhappy lad Foster met Garcia again later in the evening and caused his death, either by a direct blow, or in a struggle which brought about Garcia's death by heart-failure.

"I frankly admit," the bookseller added simply, "that my first impulse was to shield Foster by saying nothing about the quarrel, but I have respected the law all my life, and I cannot forget that society can only protect itself by the punishment of those who transgress its rules."

"You spoke of heart-failure," remarked Professor Wells; "no doubt the idea—which appears most reasonable—was suggested to you by the fact that the body bore no external marks of violence?"

"I am afraid I must not claim credit for even so much acuteness," replied the bookseller. "The simple fact is that Garcia once happened to tell me he had a weak heart. That is why I fear that poor Foster, without intending to do so, struck Garcia a fatal blow, although the same blow might not have killed another man."

HE LOOKED eagerly from one to the other of his hearers, with a pathetic air of begging them to tell him that he was wrong, and that he need have no fear for Gerald Foster.

Inspector Sims shook his head with a smile.

"Your suspicion is natural enough, Mr. Marle," he said, "but I am glad to say that I can relieve your mind."

The bookseller said nothing, but he scrutinized keenly the inspector's placid face, and in his nervous excitement he fumbled with the crook of his ebony walking stick until the stick slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor.

Roger Kent, sympathizing with the old man's distress, half rose, but Professor Wells was before him. Picking up the stick, the scientist returned it to Mr. Marle, who thanked him with a look, and again turned eagerly to Inspector Sims.

"The fact is," that officer continued, "we have been at some pains to trace

Foster's movements after Miss Fayne left him. Naturally, your statement at the police station this morning was taken very seriously—indeed, had we not chanced on a very definite piece of information, there would have been nothing for it but to detain him on suspicion. As luck would have it—and I must confess, Mr. Marle, that luck has more to do with the fortunes of criminals and of criminal-catchers than either side sometimes admits—before we had even questioned Foster we received information that made it unnecessary for us to do so. Do you know where Foster lives, Mr. Marle?"

"I'm afraid I don't," the bookseller admitted. "I believe he has lodgings somewhere within a convenient distance of my shop, and since he assured me that he was comfortable, I did not think it necessary to say more. The fact is, young men do not always receive such questions kindly, and I did not wish to seem intrusive. I did not feel myself responsible—"

He stopped, looking timidly round.

"Of course not," the professor agreed heartily.

"Although, as an older man, perhaps I should have tried to look after him a little?" suggested the bookseller dubiously.

"Nonsense. He probably would not have thanked you for it, and in any case he's old enough to look after himself," Sims declared. "But the point is this: young Foster happens to lodge in the house of one of the married police-sergeants attached to the Tottenham Court Road police station. The sergeant has a son who is, I am told, a member of the Young Men's Christian Association gymnasium class, where he is very keen on boxing. The Y. M. C. A. headquarters, as you may know, are just off Tottenham Court Road. To cut a long story short, the sergeant's son had persuaded Foster to go with him to the Y. M. C. A. to see a practise bout with the gloves between two friends of his, and Foster agreed. The sergeant's son was with Foster when they met Garcia, and waited at a little distance while Foster and Garcia quarreled, Foster having told him not to interfere. Afterward they both went to the Y. M. C. A. and remained there all the evening, afterward going home together. So you see, Mr. Marle, we need have no fear that it was Foster who murdered Señor Garcia."

Mr. Marle tapped his snuff-box, took a pinch and inhaled it in silence. Then he smiled at the three men and waved his hand in an expressively apologetic gesture.

"I am afraid you will think me a sentimental old fool," he said, "but I was far from expecting so satisfactory an explanation of Foster's proceedings."

"Like yourself," said Professor Wells smoothly, "Captain Kent and myself are not sorry to hear that this young fellow is innocent. There is something very grim to laymen like ourselves in the thought of murder, whether it be done in hot blood or cold."

"And I am the more glad," said Roger, "because I have had two words with Foster, and rather liked his manner."

Mr. Marle regarded him attentively.

"Of course," he said, nodding. "Did I not see you in the shop this morning?"

"Yes. It was my first visit, but not, I assure you, my last. You have some delightful books, Mr. Marle."

The bookseller bowed, much gratified, while Professor Wells noted with secret amusement Roger's unusual loquacity.

"You will all be very welcome in my shop at any time, gentlemen," said Mr. Marle, "whether you come to buy, or simply to share with me the happiness of handling a book or two."

He rose, looking apologetically at Inspector Sims.

"I take it," he said, "that I can be of no further use? If so, I will beg you to excuse me—there is an opportunity of buying a certain little work I have had an eye on for some time, and I do not want to lose it."

Sims rang for a clerk to pilot the bookseller to the outer world, and Mr. Marle bowed his adieux with a characteristically old-fashioned ceremony which had nothing of affectation. At the door, however, he stopped, considered a moment, and then turned to Sims.

"I am a peaceful man in my way," he said, "but I confess that this crime has stirred me more than I like. After all, Garcia was at least an acquaintance of mine. Perhaps you will think me ridiculous, but I should be glad to feel that you would call on me if there should be any way in which I could help to track down the man who killed him. There was once a mouse, you know, who helped a lion out of an awkward situation by the use of the weapons with which nature had endowed him."

Sims returned the smile that accompanied the bookseller's last words.

"Be assured," he said, "that I will not fail to ask you to help us should the occasion arise. You may possibly be of considerable help to us in finding out Garcia's relatives. But as to the question of murder, I am inclined to think that, whatever caused the attack, Garcia died simply from heart failure. A post-mortem examination is being made, of course, but I think it is not difficult to anticipate the result, now that we know that Foster has a clean sheet so far as the actual death is concerned."

WHEN the door had closed behind the bookseller Inspector Sims sat down and made a note or two, while the professor cleaned the bowl of his pipe with his customary affectionate care.

Roger Kent looked from one to the other, and struggled with an unaccustomed desire for speech.

"Decent old boy, that," he said, succumbing, and jerking his head in the direction of the door through which Mr. Marle had recently passed.

"Very," responded Inspector Sims pleasantly.

"What I mean to say: rotten job having to overcome your personal feelings as he did about that young fellow Foster; took some doing, that."

"The true British bull-dog strain," murmured the professor.

"Be quiet, Wells," said Sims. "Kent is quite right: it is never a pleasant thing to have to give away a friend."

"There was a Roman judge once (or was he Greek, or Spartan, or something?) who hanged his own son because no executioner was available to carry out the law's decree," said the professor. "It was a fine spirit. I feel like that myself, sometimes, especially when I have just paid my income-tax."

Sims laughed.

"You are incorrigible," he said.

"Well, I liked the old boy," declared Roger doggedly.

The professor chuckled.

"Of course you did," he replied, cocking an eye at Sims. "Is not our good bookseller the possessor of delightful manners and a beautiful and charming ward?"

"How do you know she is?" demanded Roger incautiously, and flushed at the professor's smile.

The inspector came to the rescue.

"I agree with you, Kent," he said, "old Mr. Marle is quite an interesting character."

"And he has a very interesting walking-stick," Wells put in.

"Never mind his walking-stick," retorted the police officer, "and for goodness' sake clear out, both of you, and let me do some work."

CHAPTER V

THE Honorable Peter Felle was a young man of enthusiasms. He believed in jolly well living up to it, don't you know, as he said himself—whatever it might chance to be at the moment.

Inspector Sims' suggestion that he should do what he described as a bit of private sleuthing had appealed tremendously to his adventurous soul.

On the morning after his informal enrolment in the forces of law and order, Peter arose somewhat before his usual hour in his eagerness to get started.

Like Roger, he made his way to Tottenham Court Road, and spent some time gazing at the doorway in which Garcia's body had been found, and trying to imagine what Mr. Sherlock Holmes would have deduced from the appearance of the place. The only conclusion he could arrive at, however, was that the premises would be the better for a fresh coat of paint. This, though undoubtedly sound, was not helpful, and Peter wandered aimlessly about the neighborhood for some time, somewhat dashed by his lack of ideas.

The horizon cleared a little, however, when he stopped to look at a miscellaneous collection of articles on a stand outside a secondhand shop. Among them was a pair of rusty handcuffs. Struck by their coincidence with his reflections, he promptly purchased them, as well as a loud whistle and a pair of old-fashioned knuckledusters.

Bestowing these articles about his person, he began to feel that he had at least made some progress toward equipping himself for his new occupation, and bethought him of lunch, for which his perambulation in the fresh morning air had given him an agreeable desire.

He had traveled somewhat far afield, the shop in which he had acquired the adjuncts of detection being in Theobald's Road, and he decided to take a short cut back to more familiar ground. To take a short cut in London, however, is too often only to prove the truth of the adage: the longest way round is the shortest way home. Peter promptly lost himself in a mesh of narrow streets, and was at last reduced to the final humiliation possible to a British subject—that of asking his way.

THUS it came about that he found himself passing through a quiet thoroughfare almost overshadowed by the British Museum. Had the polite policeman from whom Peter sought guidance indicated any other route to Oxford street, it is probable that Peter would (metaphorically) have cast himself into the hospitable arms of Signor Frascati (or his representatives) and thus have encountered Roger Kent, in which case the course of events might have been very different.

But, that those things which were written in the sand might be fulfilled, it came to pass that Peter's attention was attracted to a modest establishment on the other side of the road. This was not in itself surprising, for the appearance of the place was designed to attract. The front had been recently painted dark blue, picked out in white over the window being the word:

CLARIBEL

In the big window were set out some cakes and scones of a pleasantly fresh appearance, but the gaze of the casual was prevented from penetrating farther by a curtain of flowered cretonne.

It was not, however, the blue paint nor the cakes that drew Peter's attention. Those things he would probably have passed by with no more than the sub-conscious satisfaction they suggested to his perceptive senses. But as he approached the place there issued from the door a girl whom any man would have found it difficult to pass without a second glance.

She was dressed in some sort of frock made of the same flowered cretonne as the window curtain. Beneath it, however—and its modish brevity gave them, as Peter told himself, a fair chance—appeared two shapely legs clad in silken hose and two little feet housed in dainty shoes.

The frock covered her body, but the sleeves ended at the elbows, showing arms graceful and rounded, but well suited to golf club or racquet.

All these things the eyes of Peter perceived with the automatic appraisal of a young man whose feet walk in social circles. But the girl, having taken a swift glance at the cakes in the window and decided that they were ranged with a nice precision, turned, and for a moment her eyes met his.

Then it was that Peter realised that he had never before beheld the countenance of the Perfect Woman.

The next moment she had disappeared into the shop, and Peter stood staring at the doorway, struck into an amazed immobility entirely foreign to that self-possessed young man.

And he stood staring at the doorway until he suddenly became aware that passers-by were following his gaze with puzzled curiosity. Well, he wanted food. Food was for sale here. Why not eat here?

Entering, Peter found himself in a fair-sized, cheerful room, set with rush-bottomed chairs and tables grained in imitation of oak. On the tables were small cloths the creases of which showed a recent acquaintance with the laundry. The walls were painted blue, and on them hung a few prints framed in dark wood.

The room was empty. Hanging his hat on a peg, Peter sat down at one of the tables and inhaled the fresh daintiness of the place. And as he sat his self-possession returned, and he began pleasantly to savor this mild adventure, and to await its next development.

He had not long to wait.

At the back of the room the curtain behind a small opening moved a little. Then a pleasant voice called, "Bel!" From somewhere below another voice replied in a cheerful shout. Light footsteps were heard on a stairway, and then, from a doorway masked by a blue curtain, there entered the girl in the cretonne frock.

IF SHE recognised Peter as the young man whose eyes she had encountered a few moments before outside the shop, she gave no sign of recognition. Taking up a card on which the luncheon menu had been neatly typewritten, she placed it before him and composedly awaited his commands.

"Oh—er—good morning," said Peter.

"Good morning," she replied, and Peter instantly decided that her voice was exactly the voice that suited her eyes.

"I want some lunch, please," said Peter intelligently.

The girl's lips twitched a little as Peter looked quickly up at her, and then somehow they were both laughing.

"Of course, that's obvious, isn't it?" Peter went on.

"I rather hoped you might," the girl admitted.

"Good," said Peter cheerfully. He studied the menu. "Boiled beef. No. Roast pork and apple sauce. I say, that sounds rather jolly. Can I have some?"

"Certainly," replied the girl briskly. "With vegetables?"

"Yes, rather, please. And a whis— Oh, I forgot. I don't suppose you—"

"Serve drinks?" she answered. "No, I'm sorry. We haven't got a license."

"Oh, that's all right," Peter assured her hurriedly. "Matter of fact, I'd forgotten: I always drink water with boiled beef."

"You ordered pork," she pointed out.

"I mean pork," he said, inwardly wondering why on earth he was making such an utter ass of himself.

The girl departed, to return in a few moments with the pork, piping hot, and its accompaniments.

It was excellent pork, and Peter devoured it with a gusto enhanced by the fact that he was not distracted by the sight of the girl in blue cretonne, who retired into the back room when she had served him.

Apparently, however, he was not unobserved, for she came back as soon as he had finished.

"Busy today?" he inquired, as the girl in blue poured out his coffee from a little brown pot.

"Not very," she answered, dryly, glancing at the other empty tables.

"Of course," he said hastily. "I meant, busier than—than yesterday, so to speak?"

"We weren't open yesterday," she explained.

"Not open? By Jove, d'you mean you've only just started the show?"

She nodded.

"But how splendid! Then I'm your first customer?"

She nodded again.

"I *say!* Isn't that jolly? Look here, we ought to celebrate it, don't you think? Fizz, I mean—"

He stopped abruptly, coloring under the clear gaze of two dark eyes.

"Shall I give you your bill, *sir?*" asked the girl, with a cold contempt that made his ears burn.

"I say, do listen a moment," he begged. "I'm most frightfully sorry. Of course, it must have sounded beastly cheeky, but—well—you seemed so different, don't you know! I mean—hang it—it was just a way of saying 'Jolly good luck!' if you see what I mean."

For a moment the girl hesitated. Then she smiled, and Peter felt like a man who comes out of a cellar into the sunshine.

He stood up.

"Thanks very much," he said humbly.

"But what for?" she asked.

"For forgiving me," he answered. "I'll come again, if I may?"

"It is open to the general public," she pointed out.

"Quite," Peter retorted. "And since you haven't got a license I must bring my own—fizz!"

And with that parting shot he left her.

It is a remarkable fact that they both forgot all about the bill.

CHAPTER VI

INSPECTOR SIMS was sitting in his office after lunch on the following afternoon when Professor Wells was shown in.

The detective nodded silently, and the scientist, recognizing the mood, settled himself in the battered leather armchair and filled his pipe. He had smoked perhaps a quarter of it when Sims threw down a pencil with which he had been scribbling, rose, and began to stride up and down the little room, his hands clasped behind him in a characteristic attitude.

"It's no good, Wells," he said impatiently. "I can't get that fellow Garcia out of my head—although goodness knows there are plenty of other things waiting to get into it. Of course, the jury this morning found a verdict of death from natural causes, on the medical evidence—or lack of it—but you know as well as I do that the whole proceeding was a legal farce."

"Of course," the professor agreed. "The

proceedings at quite a lot of inquests are in the nature of a farce, but that is not the fault of the juries."

"I'm not saying it is. The fact is, I'm in a thoroughly bad temper, and I must grumble about something."

Wells chuckled.

"I know the feeling," he said. "To tell you the truth, I am not at all happy about the Garcia affair, myself. But I don't quite see what more can be done. And I don't suppose you have any time to waste?"

"I haven't. Indeed, there's a case just come in that the chief wants me to keep an eye on. I've put a good man in charge of the preliminary investigation, but I may have to look into it myself presently."

"Interesting case?"

Sims shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be. Can't tell yet. Robbery of rather a valuable lot of pearls, I'm told. Would you care to see the report?"

The professor shook his head.

"I'll wait until you know more about it," he answered. "What I came in for was to borrow those things found on Garcia's body, if I may."

"Of course. Any new theory?"

"I would hardly say that. But, like you, I can't get the affair out of my head, and I wanted to go over it again step by step, with what the newspapers love to call the 'exhibits' before me."

Sims nodded, and unlocked a drawer from which he took a small cardboard case, numbered and dated. This he handed to the professor, who stood up and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Thanks," said Wells. "I'll return them tomorrow. By the way, why not eat with me tonight in Russell Square?"

Sims hesitated.

"Thanks," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't manage it. I might look in for an hour later in the evening."

"Do. I shall be alone," said the professor, and he descended to his waiting car and drove home.

IT WAS nearly ten o'clock that night when the professor's butler ushered the inspector into the library, pulled a deep armchair near the fire and set beside it a small table and cigars.

"Port?" asked Wells, "or a brandy and soda?"

"Brandy, I think," answered the detective, a tired note in his voice.

Wells glanced significantly at the butler, who needed no such hint to add an extra finger of brandy and to limit the syphon's activity accordingly.

Sims drank, placed his glass beside him, lighted a cigar and stretched his legs comfortably. Then he turned to his friend with a smile.

"Well," he asked, "have you solved the mystery of Manuel Garcia?"

The professor rose, went over to the great, paper-littered writing table in the center of the room, and returned to his chair with the cardboard case Sims had handed to him that afternoon.

"So far from solving it," he answered, "I am more in the dark than ever. But at least I have fitted together one or two deductions which may or may not form the basis of a theory."

"Indeed?" said the detective. "I should like to hear about them."

"First," said the professor, "I want to ask you some questions, so as to get things clear in my mind. That is, if you are not too tired to talk shop?"

"Not a bit," Sims assured him. "Indeed, I shall be glad to switch my mind off the case I have been hammering at."

"In the first place, then," Wells began, "did you find out anything more about Garcia?"

"Nothing. I had enquiries made at the consulates of all the South and Central American States, and at other likely places, but nobody seemed to know anything about him. Of course, Garcia is not an uncommon name."

"What about his passport?"

"None. Our records show that he was a British citizen, naturalized before the war, and described as formerly a native of the Argentine."

"Occupation?"

"Merchant."

"That often covers a multitude of sins," Wells commented.

"It does," Sims agreed dryly.

"What was his business?" resumed the professor.

"Goodness knows. I must admit that so far we have failed to find out anything about him, except that he paid his bills regularly, apparently had plenty of money, and lived quietly and respectably enough in comfortable rooms. One thing, however, is interesting in a negative way. There were practically no papers—beyond receipted bills and so forth—among his effects."

"No letters?"

"Not one."

"Well," said the professor thoughtfully, "that may be suspicious, or it may simply mean that he was a lonely man who made few friends and had no occasion for correspondence. Had he an office, by the way?"

"We can not find that he had."

"Possibly he had retired from business."

"That may be so, of course."

"And that's all you know about him?"

"Yes, I think so, at the moment. Beyond the routine details, of course, of the date of his arrival, naturalization and so forth, which do not help us much."

THE professor stared thoughtfully before him for some moments. Then, opening the cardboard case, he took from it several objects which he arranged conveniently on the low table that stood beside Inspector Sims, and pulled his own chair nearer to that of the detective.

Sims watched this proceeding with interest. He knew his friend's methodical way too well to hurry him; and he knew, also, that Wells liked to explain his proceedings and conclusions step by step.

The professor eyed the little collection with the quiet satisfaction of a geologist contemplating his finer specimens, and refilled the delicately colored bowl of his great meerschaum pipe.

"These things," he said, waving a hand over the "exhibits" beside him, "are not without interest."

"I thought not, or you would not have arranged them with such loving care," responded the detective, on whom tobacco and old brandy had produced their comforting effects. "Now, please tell me what I ought to have seen, but didn't."

The professor smiled.

"My dear fellow," he answered, "in the first place, no one ever knows exactly what you have seen, or have not seen, until you choose to tell them yourself. In the second place, what I have seen—or think I have seen—may turn out to be of no value at all. However, let us look at these things, and see what is to be made of them. This plain gold cigaret case suggests, of course, a man of good taste, and with money enough to gratify it. That was to be expected, from what Mr. Marle told us about Garcia. The handkerchief, the match-box, the bunch of keys—none of these things interests me very much. In fact, not to waste time, the only things that attract me are the contents of the pocketbook."

Sims picked up the pocketbook, a plain leather case of a common pattern, and examined it. From one compartment he drew some visiting cards bearing Garcia's name and address; from another several postage stamps. The case had evidently been used as a money-wallet, for it contained Bank of England notes for fifteen pounds and a few one pound and ten-shilling Treasury notes. There was nothing else in the case except two pieces of paper each of which bore a pattern something like that of a chess-board, and some scribbled words.

"I looked at these things when they were brought in," he said, "but they did not strike me as being important."

Wells nodded.

"I did not consider them important, either, at first," he said. "But these two pieces of paper?"

"Cross-word puzzles," replied the detective. "Garcia was evidently one of the thousands of people who have been bitten by that extraordinary craze."

"Have you ever tried it?" asked Wells.

"No. I haven't time for that sort of thing. Besides, it always seemed rather a fatuous business to me."

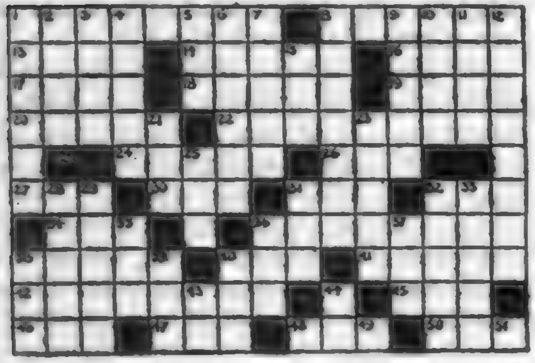
"That's because you never tried it," said the professor. "I thought so myself until somebody persuaded me to tackle one of the problems, and then I realized how amazingly fascinating they can be."

"Even so, I don't see what cross-word puzzles have to do with Garcia's death—unless you suggest that he died from heart-failure brought on by trying to solve one of these fascinating problems."

"Not at all," Wells replied, unmoved by the other's raillery. "But I am inclined to think that those arrangements of words and spaces had a good deal to do with Garcia's death, all the same. Just look at that larger one again."

Sims took up the paper, on which had been drawn in ink one of those symmetrical arrangements of black and white squares to be seen in almost any newspaper. Below the pattern were written words and numbers, the whole thing looking like this:

CROSS-WORD PUZZLE for GAZETTE



DOWN

1 *Silks*
2 *Whole*
3 *Cares*
4 *Romance*
5 *Eager*
6 *Player*
7 *Triumph*
8 *Oval dish*
9 *Night-bird*
10 *Nasal colds*
11 *Easily first*
12 *Drivers often see*
21 *The evil are punished*
23 *Give me your word*
25 *Please let me know*
28 *Underhand dealing*
29 *They must keep whirling*
31 *A fool and his cash are*
32 *You don't fly with this wing*
33 *Official military name*
35 *Rot is the word for this game*
36 *Unfortunately it was lost*
37 *Overbearing and unpopular*
38 *What eventually must always charm*
40 *The Indian literature contains it*
43 *If you do this your liability shall end.*

ACROSS

1 *Loser of race*
8 *Tame*
13 *Must be done*
14 *Parts*
16 *Somewhere*
17 *Not to attend*
18 *You can resist it*
19 *Not like night*
20 *First to finish*
22 *One who stands alone*
24 *To be willing*
26 *A woman who spins*
27 *Requires motif*

THE detective looked at the puzzle for some moments in silence.

"Beyond the fact," he said at last, "that Garcia appears to have intended entering in a cross-word puzzle competition, I'm afraid I don't make anything of this."

The professor chuckled.

"Neither should I, probably, if I had not done some similar puzzles myself," he replied. "How often have I impressed on you, my dear fellow, the importance of keeping in touch with the activities of the great world? In the cloistered seclusion of Scotland Yard—"

"Shut up!" the detective interrupted, smiling. "Or rather, don't shut up, but illumine the obscurity of my ignorance with the light of your superior intelligence."

"Professional jealousy," murmured the professor, chuckling. "Well, to be serious," he went on, "it is just another instance of the importance of trifles. If I had never done a cross-word puzzle, I should almost certainly have missed the significance of this one. How often in your experience, Sims, have you had to deal with cryptograms and cipher messages, and so on?"

"Pretty often," said the inspector dryly.

"Pretty often, indeed," the professor agreed. "I think the Yard has had, at one time or another, to handle almost every kind of cipher that has been invented. But if I am not mistaken, the one you are holding in your hand is something new."

"This is a cipher message, then?"

"I think so."

"Well, I admit I did not even give it a second thought. But go on, Wells; tell me how you found it out."

"As I said before, by a mere accident,"

Wells explained. "I had examined the various articles you lent me, and had learned nothing new from them. I was staring at that cross-word puzzle, really thinking about Garcia, when I suppose some part of my brain began mechanically to try to fit words to the squares, based on the clues given. I don't want to go into all the details of my attempts, because, to tell you the truth, I spent nearly two hours over the thing without success. I'll try to confine myself to what seem to be the essential points."

He paused, relighted his pipe, which had gone out, and resumed:

"As you have not studied this craze, I ought to mention that there are several kinds of cross-word puzzles. In some of them the clues given you from which to find out the words to be placed in the blank squares are themselves single words—such, for example, as 'ANIMAL,' which might mean 'cat,' or 'dog,' or 'elephant,' according to the number of letters required to fill the allotted blank spaces. Of course, I am taking a very simple illustration to explain what I mean. Another, and much more interesting and clever type of puzzle depends for its interest on the ingenuity of the clues given. For instance, the clue, "A foreign place, reversed, gives a famous food," might mean 'Annam'; reverse this, and you get 'Manna,' the solution of the clue."

"Ingenious," commented Sims.

"Very. And that, I can tell you, is a comparatively simple example. Some of the clues are much more difficult. Well, to come back to Garcia's puzzle: many newspapers give prizes not only for the solution of the puzzles published, but also for original puzzles submitted by readers for publication. You will see that the puzzle you have there is headed 'Cross-word puzzle for *GAZETTE*.' The other paper there, headed 'Cross-word puzzle for *STAR*,' might have been even more interesting, but unfortunately although the squares have been mapped out, no clues appear on it. Evidently the writer had been about to begin to devise his clues when something stopped him.

LET us see, then, what is to be learned from the uncompleted *GAZETTE* puzzle. As I said before, I tried very hard to solve it. In these puzzles, the usual thing to do is to work through your list of clues until you find one that seems fairly likely to be correct. You put down the word you select (the solution of the clue, I mean) in the vacant squares. Then you try other words adjoining it, and each word you get, if correct, helps you with the others. You follow?"

"Quite," said Sims. "It is a building-up process. In some ways it is not unlike solving certain forms of cipher, in which each letter you discover helps you to arrive at the remainder."

"Exactly. Well, after nearly driving myself frantic over the thing, and never finding a single word that fitted the squares correctly without clashing with some other word, I began to think that Garcia must either have been amazingly clever, or else have deliberately put down impossible clues for a joke. But such a joke was incomprehensible, for no newspaper would print it. Of course, he might have intended to give it to a friend, but in that case why put *GAZETTE* on it?

"Suddenly an idea struck me. What if the whole puzzle were merely the vehicle of some sort of secret message? The very originality of the idea appealed to me—the idea, I mean, of making use of an everyday amusement of a perfectly innocent kind to cover a secret means of communication. I may be wrong, Sims, but I don't think it has been done before."

"I have not come across it, certainly," the detective replied.

"Well, whether the idea is original or not," the professor went on, "it is certainly ingenious. Why, with one of these faked puzzles a man could communicate with an accomplice under the very noses of a dozen detectives."

"You think, then, that Garcia had accomplices with whom he had secret communication?" asked Sims.

"You shall judge of that for yourself," answered Wells, "when I have finished my explanation. As I said before," he went on, "I nearly drove myself mad trying to solve the wretched puzzle. And even when I had decided that it was not an ordinary puzzle at all, and that the clues given simply concealed a message, I could not for a long time discover the key to the message. You see, Garcia was a cunning fellow—or if not Garcia, then the man who invented the cipher that Garcia was using. The inventor, whoever he was, evidently reasoned that in the first place most people, should the paper fall into their hands, would simply take it for an ordinary cross-word puzzle. But he did not stop there: he reasoned further that it might chance to come under the eyes of some inquisitive fellow—"

"Like yourself," Sims put in, laughing.

"Well, yes," the professor agreed, "or you, for that matter. So he added a second precaution. He made his clues sufficiently obscure to put any but a very patient investigator out of the running. Of course I fell into the trap he set for me; I tried to find meanings for such phrases as 'Loser of race.' 'Must be done,' and so on, and to combine them into a sensible sentence. That was where I came a cropper.

"Then an idea occurred to me that I ought to have thought of long before: the basis of any reliable cipher must be its alphabet, and that alphabet must be as plainly apparent to the reader as to the writer—in other words, it can not be variable, as it would be if it depended on more or less fanciful solutions of clues.

"I am afraid I am being dreadfully long-winded, Sims," he interrupted himself, "especially as I know you have seen a lot of ciphers in your experience, but I am trying to show you how I arrived at the conclusion I am going to submit to you."

The detective, however, had shown no sign of impatience.

"Go ahead," he answered. "I am very much interested, but I will keep my comments until you have finished."

"I am nearly done," the professor resumed. "As soon as I realized that the inventor of the cipher had been clever enough to do the obvious thing instead of the obscure one, I saw some light. As is usual with cross-word puzzles, the clues are divided into those to be read 'Across' and those 'Down,' and each bears a number. Now, take No. 1 Across: the clue is 'Loser of race.' As it is No. 1, take the *first* letter of the clue and you get 'L.' In clue No. 8 Across, take the second letter and you get the 'A' in 'Tame.' Not to waste time, the letters thus extracted from the 'Across' clues give the following line—"

Here Wells penciled on a sheet of paper the following:

LASTWARNINGIF

"NOW," he went on, using his pencil again, "it is not very difficult to divide these letters into words, so that they read *Last warning if*— But here the ingenious inventor held me up again by an absurdly simple device—which was sufficiently effective, however, to delay me longer than I like to confess. At this point my system suddenly broke down, and I could not make head or tail of such a jumble as I got from the following words. At last the secret flashed on me. In the 'Across' clues the cipher-maker took the first letter of the first clue, the second letter of the second clue, the third letter of the third clue, and so on. But when he came to the 'Down' clues he simply began at the other end—that is, he took the *last* letter of the *first* clue, the second last letter of the *second* clue, and so on."

"Distinctly neat, that," commented Sims: "and what was the full message?"

Wells smiled a trifle grimly, wrote a line or two with his pencil, and handed to his friend a sheet of paper on which were the words:

LAST WARNING IF PEARLS
NOT GIVEN UP TODAY YOU DIE

The detective studied the message in silence for some moments.

"Garcia seems to have been in the habit of writing somewhat forcible notes to his friends," he said at last.

The professor shook his head.

"I don't believe Garcia wrote that message to send to one of his friends," he replied. "I believe somebody sent it to him."

"By Jove, you're right," cried Sims. "What an ass I am! We got some checks of his from his bank to examine, and the handwriting of the clues is quite different from that of his checks. By the way, I didn't tell you about his banking account, did I?"

"No."

"Ah, the report came in after you had gone. Garcia, it appears, had quite a respectable balance to his credit—about seven thousand pounds. Singularly enough, it was all in hard cash—I mean, he paid in sums from time to time in notes or cash, and always kept the money on current account. The manager of the branch at which he had his account at once suggested to him that he should put it on deposit, which carries interest, or should purchase securities, but he was merely asked, in quite polite words, to mind his own business."

"That's interesting," said the professor. "The natural conclusion is that Garcia wanted to be able to withdraw his money at a moment's notice if he wished."

"The same conclusion occurred to me," answered Sims dryly.

The professor laughed.

"I admit I was merely stating the obvious," he said, "but even the obvious has its value sometimes."

"Profound thought," murmured the detective.

"Here is a better one, then," the professor retorted. "That word *Gazette* on the puzzle: I suggest that *Gazette* stood for *Garcia*."

"And the word *Star* on the other one?" asked Sims.

"Why should not *Star* stand for the person who sent the message to Garcia, and to whom he was going to reply?"

Sims nodded thoughtfully.

"This man—if it is a man—who sends such peremptory messages interests me very much," he remarked. "The word *Star* somehow suggests a superior—an idea supported by the fact that he orders Garcia to do something, and threatens him with death if he does not obey."

"Profound thought," murmured the professor in his turn, and Sims smiled.

"Any more ideas?" he asked.

"Lots," answered Wells promptly; "but it is your turn to contribute a few now."

SIMS tapped his finger tips together thoughtfully.

"I make this of it: Garcia was connected in some way with the theft of valuable pearls. Either he stole them or they came into his possession in some other way. He was the agent of some person or persons to whom he should have handed over the pearls. Instead of doing so, he kept them, and in consequence he was threatened with death. Exactly what happened then is a little uncertain. It may be that he had sent a message refusing to give up the pearls; or it may be that he simply ignored the threat—the fact that he had a blank cross-word puzzle in his pocket suggests that he at first intended to reply by that means, but afterward changed his mind. Anyhow, the threat seems to have been real enough, for we certainly found him dead. Of course, I may be wrong, but there was that smile on his face—"

"I know. The Smiling Death," the professor broke in. "Let me say a word about that. You know I examined the body that night?"

"Yes."

"Well, I noticed one thing that escaped the police surgeon—partly because it was so trifling, but more because I was looking for it."

"You were looking for it?"

"Well, I rather hoped to find something of the sort after you had given me a hint about the Smiling Death. It was a shot in the dark, of course, but that sort of shot can kill a man sometimes."

"It can hang him, to use an Irishism," agreed the detective grimly. "But what did you find?"

"I found a tiny mark on Garcia's neck, just behind the lobe of the left ear. It was almost invisible—the sort of puncture you would make by sticking the point of a needle into your hand. It was only through a fairly powerful magnifying glass that it was at all plain."

Sims, deeply attentive, nodded without speaking.

"Well," the professor went on, "you will wonder why I say that I was looking for such a mark. To explain, I must digress a little, but I will be as brief as possible. Tell me, have you heard of akee?"

The detective shook his head.

"Never," he replied.

"AKEE," the scientist explained, "is the fruit of a small African sapindaceous tree, common now in the West Indies. Some authorities spell it akke, but that does not matter. The point is that akke, or akee, is a deadly poison, and very little is known about it. It is believed that the natives have used it in their intrigues, and possibly in connection with that mysterious cult called Voodoo, of which almost nothing reliable is known among white people. Now, I need not describe my researches into the subject; they were not extensive, and were only a side-issue of another question. Let me turn to a different point: you have seen, I know, cases of strychnine poisoning. Have you ever chanced to observe a case of tetanus, commonly known as lock-jaw?"

"Yes," answered the detective; "and pretty horrible it was."

"Horrible indeed. You noticed the appalling grin of the victim?"

"Yes."

"That, as you know, is called the *risus sardonicus*. When you told me about the Smiling Death I naturally thought of the *risus sardonicus*, which can be produced by strychnine poisoning."

"But the lock-jaw grin—and I presume it is the same thing as that caused by strychnine poisoning—is quite different from the smile we call the Smiling Death."

"Certainly, and that puzzled me very much for a time. But I fancy I have hit on the explanation—though I must confess that I should not care to risk my scientific reputation on the accuracy of my theory."

Sims smiled.

"Your scientific reputation is sufficiently strong to stand a few knocks," he said. "But tell me your theory, if I am not too unscientific to understand it."

"There is no need to deal in technicalities," the professor assured him. "It is results that matter. The result in this case is that I believe that a smile like that you call the Smiling Death could be produced, in certain circumstances, by a compound of strychnine and akke."

Sims reflected for a few moments.

"That is, of course, important," he said, "but how about the question of time? I mean, is it not a fact that strychnine takes time to become fatal?"

"A very sound point," the professor agreed. "I propose tomorrow to make certain experiments. Of course, they may not be conclusive, as I have no akke here to employ. But I think I can manage well enough to satisfy myself on one or two points, and I have the notes I made in my previous research. Briefly, I hope to find that a combination of akke and strychnine, and possibly another ingredient, might cause instant death, accompanied by that modified form of the *risus sardonicus* which you have named The Smiling Death."

The detective nodded.

"Excellent," he said. "If that idea is correct, we have traveled some way on our line of investigation."

"There is," added the professor, "the question of how the poison was introduced into Garcia's neck. By the way, I ought to have mentioned the fact that death from the cause I suggest would present such symptoms as might justifiably be considered to point to heart failure."

"So I presumed," answered Sims. "But as to the means by which Garcia could be poisoned: that suggests several other quite interesting questions. It was a foggy night and there were not many people about; he might have been stabbed with a thin stiletto dipped in the poison, I suppose?"

"It is possible," replied Wells. "But Garcia, although not a giant, was a wiry fellow and would probably have put up some sort of a fight. Besides, after receiving such a threat as this message contained, don't you think he would be on his guard?"

"I do," Sims agreed. "What do you think killed him, then?"

"A dart."

"From a blow-pipe?"

"Literally, yes. But not the blow-pipe used by the savage races."

"What sort, then? An air-pistol? That is a blow-pipe of sorts."

"Exactly. But I suggest an air-gun."

"An air-gun? It would be less easy to conceal than an air-pistol."

"The common type of air-gun would, I agree, but not the sort I have in mind—"

"By Jove!" the detective interrupted. "You're right—the walking-stick type, of course."

"Exactly. An air-gun made in imitation of a walking-stick would excite no suspicion anywhere, and the important point is that the extra length of the barrel makes it a much more accurate weapon."

SIMS rose from his chair, clasped his hands behind his back, and took a few turns about the room in silence. Then he turned to the professor and eyed him straightly.

"I give you best," he said. "What in the name of fortune made you suspect *him?*"

"Suspect whom?" asked the Professor innocently, but Sims shook a fist at him.

"Gregory Marle," he said.

The professor smiled.

"The way in which you can follow other people's mental processes is uncanny," he declared.

"Never mind about that," replied Sims. "Come on: out with it."

"It sounds a mad idea," Wells confessed. "Of course, I see what you are thinking: you remember my casual remark about

Marle having a very interesting stick."

"It's your dam' casual remarks that are usually the most important," grumbled the detective, with a rueful smile.

"Thank you," answered Wells cheerfully. "Somehow, I did not like Mr. Marle very much from the first. His manners are charming, and I am prepared to admit that as an actor he could give points to most of the ornaments of the legitimate stage. But did it not strike you that he was a little—just a very little—too anxious to sacrifice his own feelings by pinning the guilt of Garcia's murder on to his assistant, Gerald Foster?"

"No," Sims confessed frankly: "it didn't. If Marle is a crook, then I'm bound to say he took me in."

"That's one to him, then," said Wells. "Mind you, I'm not going to pretend that all this occurred to me at once. But I certainly was a shade surprised at two things. The first was the fact that a man of his tastes and habits should have cared to read any crime news at all in the newspaper. The second was that, although he might have felt it his duty to tell you about Foster's quarrel with Garcia, he should have taken such pains to impress on you how very black things looked against the young man."

"Now I come to think of it, he did rub it in a bit," the detective agreed.

"He did. Well, the next thing that happened had apparently no connection with the affair. It was just a little surprise all to itself—at that time. You remember that in his agitation the dear old gentleman dropped his walking-stick?"

"Yes. Was that a piece of acting, too?"

"Not at all. It was quite an accident—and one, I think, that would not please so careful a man as I believe him to be. It happened that at that moment I was looking at the stick. It is a rather fine piece of ebony, very beautifully carved, and I was admiring its workmanship. As it happened, I was near him, and without any reason beyond ordinary courtesy I picked it up for him when he dropped it. Now ebony, as you know, is one of the heaviest woods. To my surprise, that stick came up quite lightly in my hand—it weighed much less than one would naturally expect."

"Hollow," remarked Sims thoughtfully.

"Apparently so. If it had been bored out like a gun, it would have made a useful weapon."

"But a walking-stick air-gun, with its spring, is not exactly light," Sims objected.

"I agree. But it is *comparatively* light, except at the butt, or handle. A solid ebony stick of that size would be heavier than an air-gun."

"So you think that Marle shot Garcia with a poisoned dart?"

"I think that Marle either shot him, or had him shot by somebody else. I imagine that a dart with a very fine, sharp point was used. Only the long point would enter Garcia's neck, of course, and once he had fallen it would be easy enough to remove the dart, leaving practically no evidence to arouse suspicion."

SIMS gazed thoughtfully at his friend. "Even if your theory is correct," he remarked, "there is not, of course, sufficient actual evidence to connect Marle with this crime—or any other—even in the most remote degree."

"Of course not," the professor agreed.

"Which gives me some idea," the detective went on calmly, "of the number of things you have *not* told me."

Wells laughed.

"I assure you—" he began, but Sims raised an admonitory hand.

"Don't," he interrupted. "I know that when you have worked the thing out you will tell me about it—you always like to keep a card or two up your sleeve."

"It's not that," the professor protested. "But I hate telling half a story: you're just as bad yourself, for that matter. In this case, I must admit I'm like a man in a dark cellar, groping for the handle of the door. But I wanted you to know about the crossword puzzle, and so on."

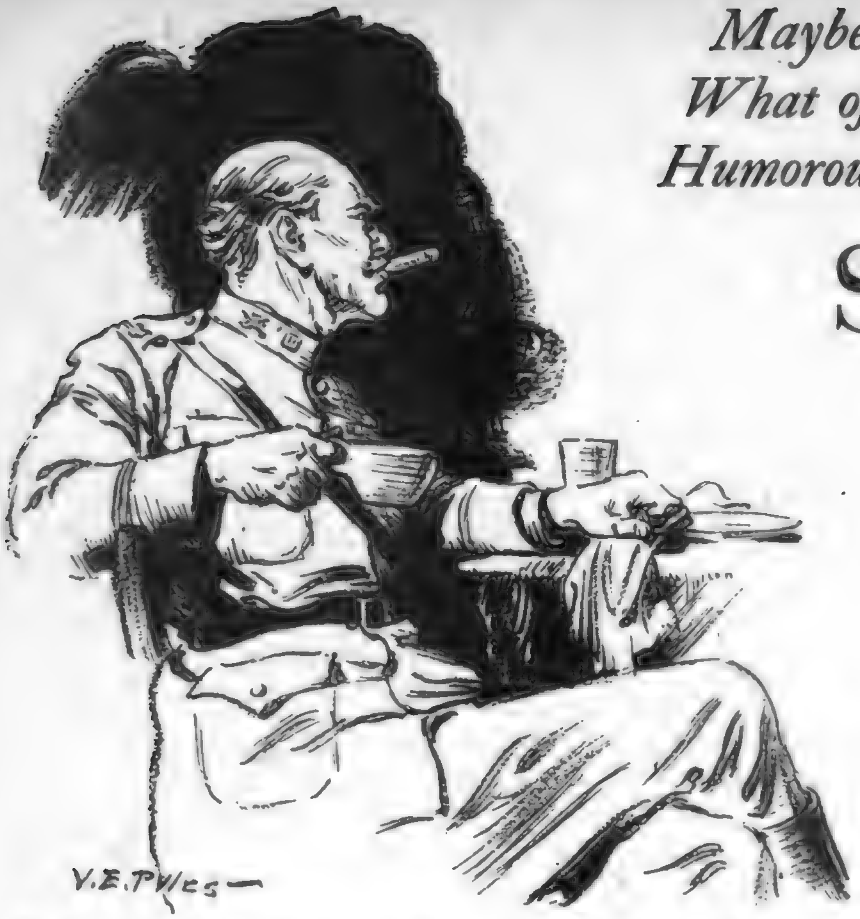
Sims nodded.

"Let us assume for a moment that you are right," he said. "If Gregory Marle *did* murder Garcia, what the devil was his motive?"

The professor picked up his pipe.

"That's what we've got to find out," he answered, his eyes twinkling. "Have another drink."

In the following chapters the murderer reveals himself and threatens further murder if investigated.



Maybe It Is a Bit
What of It? To Us
Humorous War Story

Strong

is

PRIVATE JACK LILLIS, first class, moodily contemplated a trailing puttee. He planned to continue walking until the puttee either detached itself or until it tripped its warlike owner.

Private Lillis was not a particularly martial figure. He was sandy-haired, squat. His O. D. breeches were several sizes too large, and they sagged dismally away from him, both fore and aft. One cheek protruded with a generous helping of army-issue plug. A jaunty overseas cap sat negligently on his head, wrong end to. The blouse, also too large, was unfastened at the collar and a button was missing.

Lillis was a soldier who on inspection days drove army captains to the point of insanity. He engaged in terse but sprightly conversations with inspecting colonels, in which the colonels did all the talking.

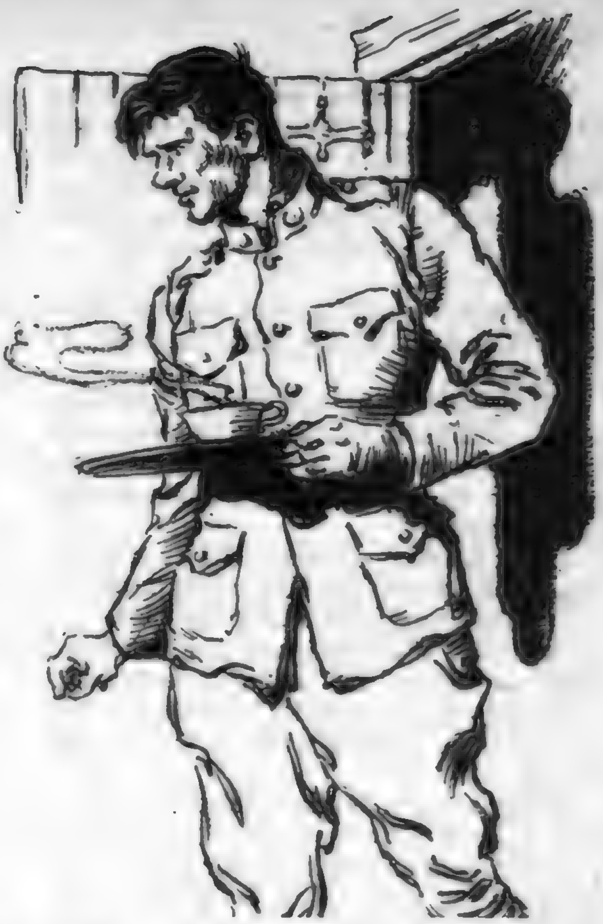
It is evident, of course, that with this indifference to his personal appearance Private Lillis was mentally slothful, a dud intellectually. He was not. Not a man, enlisted or officer, in the 550th Regiment possessed a keener brain or a more loquacious and effective tongue. And none was more affectionately esteemed.

Lillis, known far and wide as "Old Lil," said his friends, would have been brigade commander had he put his mind to it and learned to wrap his puttees. But Lil was well content to be a private, first class, in Regimental G-2. He had functioned throughout the war in his own personal way as an observer. Attached to various battalion headquarters in the lines he had with great deliberation and lack of nerves gazed through telescopes at the enemy lines, reporting all of the things he saw and many of the things he presumed were happening outside his own not infallible vision. Lil did not take the war with any great amount of seriousness. He yielded to officers a rather tolerant deference and would, as occasion required, calmly take a chance with his neck. During the Argonne drive he came trudging back with twelve prisoners. Once out of artillery cross-fire he had engaged in a spirited conversation with a Prussian sergeant who had tended bar in Chicago. Lil and his prisoners reached the M. P.'s at the rear before he had quite finished a discussion of whether beer in the old days was or was not all it seemed to be, what with the war nowadays taking the kick out of all the steins. The

Incredible but It's the Most We've Ever Read

Drink Raging

By BLATZ HENDERSON



German prisoners were all for electing Lil burgomeister or something.

HAVING weathered the war Lil was now having considerably worse luck lasting out the armistice. Regimental intelligence was quartered in an abandoned office building in the starved little town of Sampigny. Included in the detail was the captain, three sergeants, and three privates, of which Old Lil was the most confirmed private. The captain, who was rather busy with a Red Cross worker from Boston, was put to it to find something for his men to do. It was, by virtue of its character, relieved of detail, guard and company formations. Being responsible to the G-2 captain it led a pretty soft life during the long months in which the division waited impatiently for General Pershing to remember to send it home.

Sergeant Bones Broun was in charge. The sergeant got his name from his physique, all bones and muscle. He stood six feet, weighed two hundred and was a lazy good-natured individual who was willing to call it a day and get back to his western Kansas ticket office, where he had been a telegraph operator.

The sergeant, under explicit instructions from Captain Horton not to get caught loafing, was in the habit of ordering his meager but intellectual squad out on the road with a set of tripods, maps and azimuth boards and earnestly exhort them to act as busy as possible. He himself would then head for the Y canteen, where he played checkers all day long with a sergeant from headquarters company.

Private Lillis and Private Union, the latter as neat and dapper as Lillis was slovenly, comprised the entire intelligence section at work. The rest, one by one had sneaked quietly away to rest up. It was a gray, sloppy January day and there had been much grumbling from the regimental intelligentsia as Sergeant Bones had ordered the entire squad out on the road to make a "survey."

"Now you birds got to stay out here and look busy till noon," he declared. "Captain told me last night Colonel Whipple asked him what was we doing now to keep in trim. Said he looked suspicious and he says he wouldn't be surprised but what the old man takes a snoop up to the rooms today to see if he can't catch us in there pounding our ear."

With which warning Bones stalked away to the Y. M. C. A. Shortly after every one but Lil and Union had also disappeared from the road which the intelligence section was officially surveying for curves and inclines—for the twentieth time in two months.

Private Lillis, noting that he and Union were the sole survivors, spoke bitterly and to the point.

"Well, Jack, we are the fish on crutches as usual. That's the way it is in this man's army. You contribute five minutes' worth of honest labor and you get stuck for the rest of the day."

He spat disconsolately and turned his aggrieved attention to his trailing puttee.

"Putt's loose, Lil," observed Union.

"Yes, the blankety blank gol-hammered nuisance," agreed Lil, walking calmly on.

"You'll step on it in a minute," said Union. The trailing putt gave him the fidgets.

"Well, now," remarked Lil calmly, "the way to look at that is this. That there putt will keep on trailing as long as it don't come off my shin. Now I remember distinctly that I stuck one end of the dad-blamed thing in my shoe this morning. So we can assume that it ain't going to come off my shin in which case it will trail. All right, with that as a—"

"Aw, go to hell, you big slob," interposed Union. "Why don't you cut out that oratory and fix that damn thing? It gets on my nerves."

"Now you look at this thing in entirely the wrong light," replied Lil solemnly as he shifted his working supply of cut plug in preparation for another flow of logic.

"DON'T you men ever salute an officer?"

The old familiar words cracked out like a whip and Union and Lil came out of their conference to confront Colonel Whipple, tall, gray, military and severe. The colonel's presence would have gone unnoticed by the two privates had the officer chosen to go modestly by on his own side of the road. But he didn't. Instead he moved menacingly toward the pair.

Private Union swung his hobnails together with a crack and came to a snappy salute which he held rigidly. The colonel's stern features relaxed. If there was anything that softened his disposition it was to see a soldier salute him as a soldier should.

Private Lillis, some ten seconds slower than Union, also essayed a snappy crack of the heels. The trailing putt, having matured to healthy growth a ball of mud, swung high, wide and handsomely into the air, the earthy tail fetching up with a squash against the colonel's brilliantly polished boots. The mud ball exploded like a hand grenade and January slush sprayed the regimental commander's immaculate uniform.

Lil, maneuvering himself into a salute, watched with unblinking eye the fatal flight of his errant puttee. With hand stiffly at salute he watched the colonel grow apoplectic as the spray spattered into his face and over his uniform.

The colonel changed his mind about acknowledging the salute and struggled for words that he might express himself becomingly as an officer and yet with sufficient vehemence to avert internal combustion.

"You," he roared, "what's your name? Why did you let that puttee get in that condition? Are you paralyzed? What are you doing here? Who is your commanding officer?"

Lil stood stock still, his hand still at salute.

"Private John Benjamin Lillis, sir. I was just about to rewrap it sir. I am not, sir. We are surveying the road, sir. Captain R. S. Horton, sir."

Lil spoke softly, persuasively, even compassionately. There was not the slightest trepidation in his manner, but his manner was eminently respectful.

The colonel stared sharply at Lil, then reluctantly acknowledged the salute.

"You, young man," he declared, "are a disgrace to the American Army. It is a wonder we won the war. Any one so abominably lazy and so utterly slovenly has but one function to perform with the American Expeditionary Force, and that is peeling potatoes in the mess hall."

"Yes, sir," agreed Lil solemnly.

"You men think just because the war is over that you can do as you please and you go about looking like yokels. I've a good notion to report you for kitchen police from now until we sail for home.

"What company do you belong to?" he demanded.

"Intelligence section, regimental headquarters, sir," Lil replied. "With the Colonel's leave sir, I will now adjust this refractory puttee."

The colonel nodded curtly, staring sharply at Lil, trying futilely to detect a note of insubordination in Lil's voice or manner.

"Consider yourself confined to quarters until I have got in touch with Captain Horton," announced the colonel, and turning on his heel strode away.

"YOU played hell with that putt, didn't you," remarked Union. "Why didn't you do a little more wrappin' and less yappin' when I told you about it first?"

"Well, now this is the way I look at it," remarked Lil, drawing a fresh supply of plug from his pocket and biting into it with relish. "I got to go to quarters. I dassent do any more of this heavy survey work. You better get to surveyin' now," he added. "You ain't arrested and you got to keep on workin'. Pretty soon old Horsefly is going to wake up and commence wonderin' where the rest of this here intelligentsia squad has got to and hell will be poppin'."

"Naw, you don't," said Union. "What he said goes for me too until I get further notice. I'm in quarters too." He folded up his tripod and prepared to accompany Lil to a vastly warmer imprisonment.

On their way to quarters Union and Lil stopped at Madame's place. They emerged with two quart bottles of *vin rouge*, the sipping of which, they agreed, would provide spiritual solace in the hour of their great disgrace.

Back again at the comfortable rooms they lost no time entering a two-handed contest of skill. The skill consisted mainly in correctly estimating whether one's own unseen card was of more profitable character than one's opponents'.

"The idear," mused Lil after several hands and several elevations of the bottle, "the idear of a man of Old Scare Face's temperament speaking to men like you and me the way he did."

"He didn't show us the *espree de corps*," contributed Union stiffly.

"The old galoot," declared Lil, "was speakin' to the two prob'ly mose distinkwished soldiers of the private class in the A. E. F."

"I had a notion to hit him," asserted Union. The discovery of this notion had come with the fifth drink.

"Now I wouldn' want to hit the old beezer," Lil ruminated, staring fixedly at the bottle, the upper three-fourths of which was showing sunlight. The transparency drew Lil's unfavorable attention and he offered derogatory comments on the phenomenon.

" 'F there's anything I don' like to see," he proclaimed thickly, "'s sunlight in a bottle of vin roosh."

"Sunlight gets in your eyes," Union agreed drowsily.

"Sunlight awright in its place," Lil observed, "which ain't in no bottle wine. When you look at bottle wine," he emphasized loudly, "w'en you look at bottle wine you expect—you expect 'tsee. Now what do you expect 'tsee?"

Lil fixed his eyes accusingly on Union as he uttered this question. Union started, looked guilty.

"Shure," he replied loudly.

"I ask you senzible queshtion," Lil pointed out, "I ask you why is sunlight and you evaded queshtion. You evaded queshtion."

Saddened by this phase of the situation Lil tipped the bottle and gurgled long. In fact he gurgled until there was no further reason to gurgle, with the result that two empty bottles lay where two full ones had stood before.

As the two useless quarts rolled across the table Lil and Union stared at each other with saddened countenances.

"Two good men gone west," Lil intoned solemnly. He was on the point of enlarging on the demise when a sharp rap at the door stirred them to action.

Union made a dive toward the floor where the two bottles had fallen with a crash. He missed the tackle and sprawled forward on his belt buckle, both hands outstretched, fingers barely touching each of the ex-wine containers.

IT WAS in on this touching picture that Colonel Whipple burst, having given the door a vigorous shove. His eyes grew round with amazement at the spectacle.

Propped against a table was Private Lillis, first class, his wrap puttees sagging in loose folds about midway between the knee and shin. The colonel didn't miss that little detail. Private Lillis, in person, was in the throes of another salute. Unfortunately in this emergency Private Lillis had reverted or progressed to the French salute and his generous palm was thrust outward from his right ear.

One story below Private Lillis was Private Union, staring into the colonel's face, his finger tips still reaching wildly for the elusive bottles.

"What is that man doing down there?" bellowed Colonel Whipple to Private Lillis.

"He just got through fainting, sir, as you came in, sir," replied Private Lillis in a husky voice.

"What are those two bottles doing?"

"They were just leaving, sir. I mean, sir, they are just two bottles, sir."

Lil was considerably at sea in spite of the fact that the colonel's entrance had sobered him materially.

The colonel snorted and spread his legs apart as if he expected to remain some time.

"Snap out of that silly salute," he ordered Lil. "Stand at attention. You're not standing at attention. You're leaning at rest."

Lil ventured a small distance from the table. His head spun and the colonel seemed to sway up and down. He gritted his teeth and hung on. The colonel turned his attention to Private Union, who had abandoned the idea of retrieving the bottles and was now struggling to his knees.

"Well," rapped the colonel, "stand up, if you're able." Union stood waveringly on legs that threatened to sit down on him. Swaying like two fragile vines in a cyclone Privates Lillis and Union confronted their colonel.

"Both on duty. Both confined to quarters. Both drunk. Looks like court-martial," observed the colonel coolly. The grizzled old veteran had apparently resorted to philosophy in his hour of trial.

Lil and Union said nothing repeatedly.

"Court-martial. Labor battalion at St. Nazaire. I am now looking at the last two enlisted men to leave France for the United States," he remarked grimly.

Lil swallowed with difficulty and Union gulped with ease. It was the first time in Lil's army career that he had nothing to say. There was apparently no loophole for respectful argument and if there had been Lil was in no position to see it.

"Instead of putting you under guard I am once more going to leave you confined to quarters," said the colonel sharply. "Under no circumstances are you to leave this room."

He turned around and strode out in search of Captain Horton. Captain Horton was going to catch it. In the meantime he would devise some crosses for Privates Union and Lillis to carry about with them.

"THAT—this," remarked Lil to Union, "is what you get for gettin' yourself arrested where you wasn't invited."

That evening Captain Horton strode in looking as peaceful as a bear with the mumps. He sat down heavily and devoted his attention to Privates Lil and Union, who were apparently in failing health.

"Well, you two birds certainly are an asset to this organization," the captain began.

"You've not only got yourselves in hot water for the remainder of the war but you've got the entire section back to work. You will all report to Captain Harris in the morning for drill duty. You three sergeants, who probably can't do right face any more, will likely serve as file closers for the duration of the American Expeditionary Force's post-war activities. You, Private Brady, will polish up your gun and start marching. You will be subject to kitchen police, guard duty, and what else they have got."

As the captain paused for a recapitulation of disasters the regimental intelligence personnel cast stunned but baleful glances at Privates Union and Lillis, who sat staring forlornly at the ceiling. The captain continued.

"The old man not only gets his face all butchered up by Lil's trick puttee but he comes up here later to find Lil and Union in the grip of delirium tremens and swilling vin roosh to boot. The old man, as you all damn well know, is a teetotaler and a crank about fire water. He claims he never tasted likker in his life. You know what he's done now? He's issuing an order that any enlisted man caught with likker in his mitts or gizzard will catch it. And he's passed the word around that any officer caught with a French breath will face charges.

"The old man," resumed the captain bitterly, "was superintendent of a Sunday school in Caldwell before us national guards got into the army. He's been mighty fidgety about his regiment losing its soul to demon rum. Now you two birds have got yourselves, the section, the battalion and the regiment into the strait-jacket. Got anything to say?"

Private Lil could not resist the invitation to an oration, albeit he really had nothing to say and was aware of the deficiency. But he was optimistic.

"For myself, sir, I have nothing to say," he replied. "It will always be a source of profound regret to me that anything I should have done should redound to the disadvantage of the section, battalion, regiment. I feel confident, sir, that given time I will be able to correct this deplorable situation."

Lil, with this oration, automatically felt one hundred and ten per cent. better. The captain grunted.

"Yah, I guess it will take plenty of time. Private Lil will now rescue the regiment from kitchen police. Well, you two guzzle hounds want to hear the bad news now?"

Private Lillis and Private Union did not indicate any burning desire to become informed, so the captain proceeded in better humor.

"Union," he said, "will act as orderly, kitchen police and waiter at officers' mess. The old man told me he had some hope he could save Jack from a drunkard's grave and he wanted to keep in touch with him.

" 'As for that loquacious person with the flying puttees,' the old man told me, 'I want him put where none of his buttons will snap off and kill a bunch of men. I want him put where as few as possible will see him.' "

THE captain paused to choose his words carefully. He was achieving no little satisfaction in sketching Lil's disgrace in the most vivid terms. He was somewhat curious as to how Lil would respond, never having seen that felon out of countenance or without rebuttal of some sort.

"The old man said," he continued, "that after much meditation he had become convinced that the well being of the regiment demands that Lil and his funny uniform retire to some kitchen. He said he believed Lil's talents lay in the direction of removing skins from potatoes and grease from pots. In fact he ordered that you go on K. P. duty in the morning at officers' mess, where he can keep a jaundiced eye on you. Both sentences are indefinite, I presume for the duration of the armistice, meaning from now on."

Lil gestured largely, if a bit faintly.

"Will the Captain be so kind as to convey to the colonel Private Lillis' appreciation of the singular honor. He realizes he is probably the only private assigned personally by the colonel to that splendid corps of the army known as kitchen police."

"Your phraseology is forced and your optimism is unwarranted. You also forget that you hold the honor of being the first and only private to get an entire regiment in a jam," the captain replied shortly. "You and Union report at officers' mess at five in the morning. The rest of you stand reveille and prepare to drill." The captain departed.

"Strong drink is raging. Wine is a dadgummed mocking bird," pronounced Lil at five the next morning as he and Union shuddered in the biting cold. Here and there a nose protruded bravely into the chill room but for the most part only a roll of blankets indicated suffering humanity in repose. The American soldier usually crawled into a blanket and pulled it in after him, thus defying all the laws of health and regulations for sound, healthy sleep.

"Where you birds think you're goin' to?" demanded the cook at officers' mess with characteristic sourness. "Evenin' party? Git here earlier after this. Git a knife and pare them spuds."

The colonel's mess was an idiosyncrasy of that estimable national guard commander. It was his idea that the colonel of the regiment should, in a way, be the head of the house at meal-time as well as on the field, and he organized affairs after this hypothesis. After the armistice, contrary to army practise, he organized a mess in the chateau serving as regimental headquarters, in which battalion and company commanders participated at his invitation. Platoon commanders had a separate mess of their own. In announcing his plan to keep in social touch with the entire regiment he quite generously stipulated that his invitation was not to be regarded as a command and that exigencies of service would be taken into consideration as legitimate excuse for absences. Thus he left a loophole which many captains, and occasionally a major or two, took advantage of, finding it imperative to be absent on frequent occasions.

FOR the colonel's mess was not a meeting of convivial souls. The company commanders may have been convivial given the proper setting, which was not where the colonel presided. The colonel's idea of conduct becoming an officer bordered on requirements for a Sunday-school life certificate. He was not especially officious about this private and official rectitude. He merely expected it as a matter of course. Knowing comparatively little of the off-drill hours of his enlisted men discovery of the frank delinquency of Privates Lillis and Union had somewhat shocked him.

Passing through the basement kitchen a few days later the colonel observed Lil on his knees scouring a huge pot. Lil's fatigue clothing was black with grease. His face was smudged and his hands were raw and red from dish-water and cold air. But his countenance was cheerful. The colonel paused and surveyed the penitent private.

"You should now feel comfortable," he remarked. "You look like a peasant. I presume you have discontinued the use of alcohol."

"Yes, sir," replied Lil scrambling to attention, "I shall never touch another drop, sir, as long as I live, sir."

The colonel looked almost pleased at this sign of reformation.

"I am glad to hear it," he said severely. "Some day you may get back to civilian life. You will never get anywhere if you drink liquor. The world has no place for a man who dissipates his inheritance of health and intelligence for a few moments of debasing forgetfulness."

Private Union was now serving as a mess boy and his duties in the kitchen were considerably lighter than Lil's. His neat appearance and soldierly trimness pleased the colonel who employed him frequently as an orderly. In the double rôle of waiter and orderly Union soon found himself relieved of the disagreeable kitchen work.

"When you going to get the regiment outa the fix you got it in?" he asked Lil.

"Yah, the fix I got it in," Lil replied with spirit. "Who got us in here anyway? You wraslin' on the floor with them bottles, that's who. I could have got us by if you'd been anywhere but spilled over the rug. If you'd had sense enough to lay still I could have made 'im think you fainted or had epileptic fits or had died or something."

"You're looney," Union retorted. "You leanin' against a table with a French salute on. Don't kid yourself you didn't look or act like nothin' but a soused swill."

"Well," replied Lil with dignity, "regardless of minor details of that unfortunate day I said I'd get us out of it and I will. Give me time, will you?"

"Well this beats a labor battalion, anyway, which is liable to happen to us if you try to get cute," Union warned.

It happened that several nights later Union became ill and was taken to divisional hospital at Commercy. Union's illness left the mess without a waiter.

Lil was forced into service, after being required to clean his face and hands and don a uniform.

"Better git them leggin's on so's they'll stay," the cook advised, "colonel's goin' to be lookin' at 'em."

"I will be able to adjust my uniform without assistance from the galley," Lil remarked loftily.

"Go easy on them words, will ya," the cook responded, "this ain't no debatin' party."

CAME mess time and none was there but the colonel. Various orderlies during the late afternoon and evening had informed headquarters of the regret which their respective officers found it necessary to be away on highly important business connected with the welfare of the Allied cause.

So the colonel ate in silent grandeur with Lil transporting the food back and forth from the kitchen in the basement of the abandoned dwelling-house to the dining-room.

"Where's the other man and what are you doing here?" asked the colonel sharply as Lil appeared on the scene.

"He is ill, sir, taken to the hospital, and I am substituting for him, sir," Lil replied.

The colonel stared at Lil's ill-fitting uniform. All buttons were strangely in place. His glance went down to Lil's puttees.

"Will you put that string in?" he asked resignedly.

Lil quickly glanced down to discover that in spite of what he considered careful wrapping the cloth facing had worked out of the woolen wrap and was preparing to unwind as it had done on the first fatal day.

"I will here repeat," said the colonel, "that you are undoubtedly the most slovenly soldier in the American Expeditionary Forces, including the Army of Occupation."

"Yes, sir," agreed Lil sadly and departed for the kitchen.

Keeping an alert eye on the cook Lil produced a long slim bottle from beneath a pile of fatigue clothes in the corner. Into a cup of coffee destined for the colonel he poured perhaps a thimbleful.

A few moments later the colonel put down his coffee with a startled look.

"Lillis," he called, "come here. This coffee doesn't taste right. What's wrong with it?"

"I shall ask the cook, sir," said Lil and he backed out toward the kitchen.

Reappearing a few seconds later Lil informed the colonel that the cook said the coffee was flavored with a French extract and that he hoped it was quite to the colonel's liking, it being considered a delicacy and the cook having spent a month trying to purchase it.

The colonel took another tentative sup.

"Tastes a little bitter," he remarked, and drank about half of it.

"Another cup of coffee," he ordered a short time later.

This time Lil increased by just a fraction the amount of famous French flavoring. The cook had called it a day and was out of the kitchen, so Lil's manipulations went about quite openly.

As the meal progressed so increased the colonel's fondness for coffee. Each time Lil filled the order he decreased the coffee and increased the extract until the fifth cup contained one part coffee and three parts famous French flavoring. As the colonel dined he became jovial.

"So you're the boy with the puttees, are you?" he inquired jocularly as he ordered his seventh cup of steaming hot coffee.

"Most unusual case," he added, frowning severely. "You ever have an operation on those legs of yours? Ought to. Something cert—certainly wrong with those, with those er—legs."

Then the colonel became drowsy and Lil, hovering about the table like a faithful servitor, saw to it that the coffee cup was never empty. He pressed into service two cups, which he alternated, the colonel apparently not noticing that he was drinking coffee constantly but was never out of the liquid. Eventually Colonel Whipple fell asleep, his head falling on his folded arms.

THEN Private Lillis did a heinous thing. He brought from the kitchen two empty cognac bottles. One of them he placed gently on the floor, where the colonel's foot would kick it when he wakened, if he ever did. The other he set on the table in front of the sleeping officer. Then Lil did another heinous thing, on his discovery that the colonel was not wearing his usual shining leather boots but instead a pair of fine woolen wrap puttees. Working quietly as a pickpocket at a funeral he unfastened the silken band that held them tight near the top. He unwound it about half-way down and he distributed the colonel's puttee over the floor.

Then turning out the light he locked the door and sat down in an adjoining chair, waiting for the colonel to rouse. At five o'clock the colonel showed no signs of waking and Lil prepared to shake him gently by the shoulder. The cook would be back at six and it wouldn't do for that uncouth individual to know anything.

Just as Lil was rising from his chair, weary but happy, the colonel started violently. "What, what?" he shouted weakly.

"Just a moment, sir," Lil said softly. He lit the heavy oil-lamp chandelier. The colonel stared about him, pressing his hand to an aching head.

"What happened?" he asked in bewilderment, his eyes lighting on the empty cognac bottle on the table, his foot striking and rolling to the center of the room the other.

"I beg pardon sir," said Lil. "Doesn't the Colonel remember what occurred?"

"I ate dinner and now I have a headache," the colonel said. "What," he asked thickly, "are those bottles doing there?"

"Would the Colonel like to hear what happened?" asked Lil unctuously.

"Yes, yes," the colonel responded. "Don't stand there like a knave. Tell me what happened." He massaged his aching head with a trembling hand.

"After the Colonel dined," said Lil, "he complained of a headache and asked the private to get him a sip of brandy, for medicinal purposes. The private procured the brandy in a small glass and after that the Colonel requested a sip of cognac which the private was compelled to get in a bottle. The Colonel drank the cognac and asked for another bottle to ease the headache, which the private also procured. Seeing the Colonel was not feeling himself the private locked the door after telling Adjutant Macready for General White that the Colonel was not at home."

During this recital the colonel sat round-eyed, his lower jaw sagging. He recalled nothing of the bottles episode but he did remember with a sickening certainty that he had felt particularly genial toward Private Lillis and had joked with him. The circumstance, he knew, indicated that he might have done anything.

"Er, did any one else call?" the colonel asked.

"No, sir."

"You're sure Adjutant Macready didn't er—see me?"

"Absolutely, sir. There have been no callers. The private turned out the light later and locked the doors, sir, also closing the windows."

The colonel started, looked guilty.

"Did I er—do anything?"

"Only a song or two, sir. And a little jigging, sir," replied Lil deprecatingly.

"Good God!" the colonel cried. "Tell me, did I sing? And dance?"

"The Colonel asked the private to join him in a few old church hymns, sir. We sang *Bringing in the Sheaves*, sir. And *When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder*."

The colonel groaned.

"You said I jigged?"

"Not exactly, sir," said Lil. "It was more of a square dance, sir. The Colonel was a bit unsteady on his feet, sir."

THE colonel gazed forlornly at the floor, all the military starch taken out of the rigid figure. His gaze dwelt on the wrap puttee, now stringing across the floor. Heavily he leaned over and rewrapped it. He said nothing. Neither did Lil.

Colonel Whipple rose unsteadily to his feet.

"You will, of course, for the remainder of your life remain silent about this awful night. A ghastly mistake has been made somewhere. I have never, had never, tasted a drop of liquor. I can not account for what has occurred this night. I have a headache. I shall go to bed. You will clean up this mess."

Lil stood at attention.

"Shall I work today, sir?" he asked. "The private did not sleep, sir," he reminded.

The colonel sat down heavily and passed his hands over his eyes.

"I am not at all sure that some dastardly trick has not been played on me," he said bitterly. Then his mind went to that suspicious and entirely unaccountable feeling of friendliness for Lillis. Then he got a vision of himself, the commander of the regiment, explaining that a private under arrest had got him intoxicated. He could hear Lil's whispered comments to just one person. He knew how quickly the tale would sweep the division.

"I shall make you a er—a proposition," he told Lil sourly.

"Never speak to any one, so long as you live, about this beastly incident. I shall return you to your section today."

"And Private Union, sir?" asked Lil with great reverence.

"He, too," the colonel snapped.

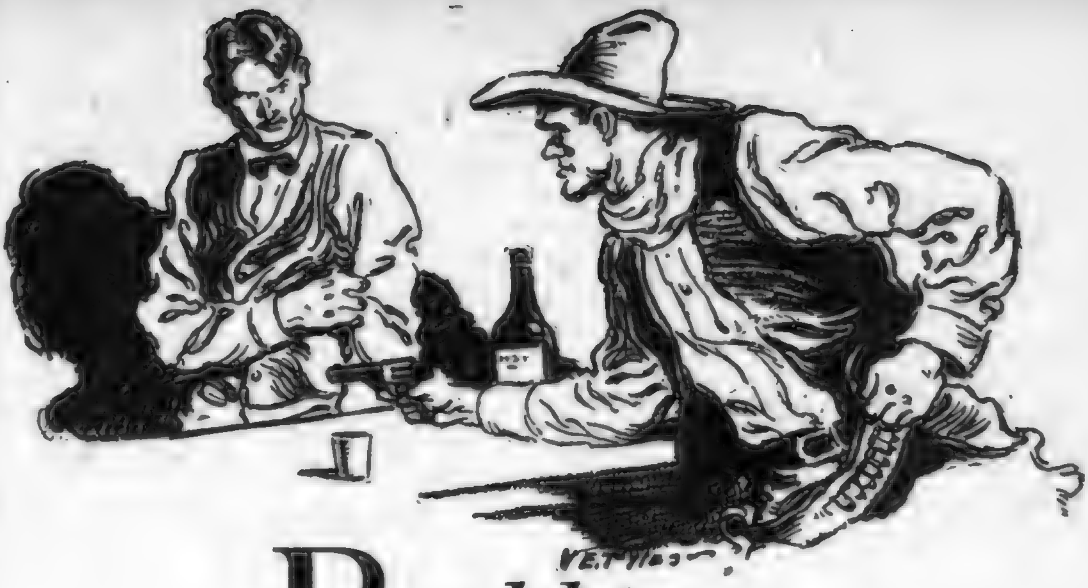
"Begging the Colonel's pardon, sir," remarked Lil, "the intelligence section, sir, is eager to get back to its war-time functions, and," he continued faintly but firmly, as if aware of the risk he was taking, "the boys in the regiment were hoping the Colonel would see fit to be a bit lenient on them in case they took just a small drink of beer or wine. They are so far from home, sir," he added brightly and earnestly.

"All right, all right, all right," the colonel put in hastily. "Utter silence, remember, or I'll put you in a labor battalion and I'll see to it that you stay in this unhealthy country until reconstruction has been completed."

The colonel paused midway up the stairs en route to his room. He glanced down at Lil, who was busily removing scenes of the night's tragedy.

"Tell the cook," the colonel muttered, "never to serve coffee with that French flavor again. The taste is utterly repugnant to me."

And the colonel ran a fuzzy tongue over a parched mouth.



Rabbit

It was too much to ask even of a coward

By NEIL T. McMILLAN

"WHAT?" Mr. Bodkin, in the act of removing the whisky bottle and glass from the makeshift bar of the Santa Fé Trail store, recoiled from the hot voice of his customer. Green, cat-like eyes, set in an ugly, bearded face, glared at him across the counter. Although he trembled as he said it, Mr. Bodkin renamed the price.

"One dollar, please."

"What?" the dust-covered purchaser shouted again. "For one glass of rotten whisky, thet's half water anyway, you're a-chargin' a dollar?"

Mr. Bodkin felt that trouble was coming and he hated trouble. He stood on his tiptoes and looked across the heads of teamsters, scouts and soldiers crowding under the smoking oil lamp. His employer, Sam Colvin, as rough as his customers, was selling merchandise at the opposite counter. Unable to catch his employer's eye, Mr. Bodkin dropped to his heels and sighed.

"Yes, sir, a dollar, please."

With slow deliberation the purchaser drew a huge six-gun and rested it over the counter with its muzzle pointing at Mr. Bodkin's chest.

"Jest what was thet you said, sister? You're so nice an' purty with thet white shirt, all frills, and thet nice black tie, it 'ud be a shame to git you all mussed up. Now jest what was it you was a-sayin'? Two bits, wasn't it?"

Mr. Bodkin looked despairingly about the ring of grinning faces. He backed as far as possible from the baleful eyes of the man with the gun. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"It is what the proprietor has asked me to charge."

"I ain't askin' you what the proprietor asked you to charge, I'm askin' you what you're a-goin' tuh charge me; two bits, ain't it?"

Mr. Bodkin was about to say "yes," when he saw the expression on his tormentor's face suddenly change and saw him slowly raise his hands, dropping his gun. He heard his employer's heavy voice.

"The charge to you, hombre, is two dollars. Savvy?"

There was an angry scowl between the man's eyes but he nodded.

"All right, Rabbit," Sam addressed Mr. Bodkin, "the gent says he'll pay. Take his money."

Mr. Bodkin took the proffered money

and at a further command from Sam picked up the customer's weapon, extracted the shells and returned it to him.

Sam removed the muzzle of his own gun from the stranger's back and growled at him.

"Now then, you would-be bad man, git the hell outa here."

Sam holstered his gun; the man turned and as the two looked at each other, hating recognition leaped into their eyes.

"Ol' Green-eye, hisself," Sam muttered and redrew his gun. "Git the hell outa here."

Without a word, Green-eye backed to the door and out into the night.

MR. BODKIN again settled himself to the task of waiting on his customers but they were soon gone. There came the shouts of wagon bosses and the closely packed crowd thinned out. Wagon trains traveled at night over this particular stretch of the trail to escape the almost unbearable heat that shimmered over it during the day. The few stragglers in the store bolted into the night to be met with loud profanity. More cracking of whips, more creaking of wheels, more crunching of sand and a silence, broken only by the soft whistle of the wind in the sage brush, descended on the two men in the store.

Sam, as became his dignity as proprietor, eased himself to a seat on the counter while Mr. Bodkin busied himself wiping his stock of glasses on the bar.

"Ol' Green-eye, hisself, and ornery as ever," Sam muttered to himself. "Wonder what he's a-doin' in this part o' the country. Ain't seen him fer a year. An' I wonder if Jake and Slim's with him. Most likely they is, 'cause them there bad hombres usually travels together, Rabbit."

Mr. Bodkin glanced at his employer.

"Put out thet lamp."

"But, sir, how shall I see to complete my work?"

"Yuh c'n light a candle an' put it behind yuh, there on the bar."

There was something about the request and the way in which it was made that caused Mr. Bodkin to feel uneasy. Nevertheless he carried a candle to the lamp, lighted it and, after placing it on the shelf behind the bar, extinguished the lamp. The result was that Sam was almost completely in shadow. He eased his gun on his hip and murmured: "Thet's better, don't want nobody taking a pot-shot at me."

Mr. Bodkin paused in the act of picking up a glass.

"Pot-shot?"

Sam answered quickly with disgust in his voice. "Soon's I mention shootin' yuh git scared."

Mr. Bodkin paused for only a fraction of a second, picked up the glass and wiped it. He felt his employer's eyes upon him and shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps you are right," he said.

He wiped three glasses, while Sam, showing an ever increasing contempt in his eyes, gazed steadily at him. After a full minute of silence Sam spoke.

"Rabbit, you're a good storekeeper, 'bout as good as any, I reckon, but there's one big thing the matter with you. Know what thet is?"

Mr. Bodkin shook his head. Sam spoke slowly, like a man who gave an insult and expected to shoot immediately afterward.

"You ain't got no guts."

Mr. Bodkin saw Sam's hand unconsciously and unnecessarily move toward the butt of his pistol. He again shrugged his polite shoulders and answered evenly.

"Perhaps you are right."

Sam spat contemptuously into a sand-filled box, dropped to his feet and walked to the door. Mr. Bodkin set down the last of his glasses, wiped the bar and, after casting an appraising glance over it, left for other duties.

AN EMPTY barrel stood at the end of the counter. Mr. Bodkin rolled it to the center of the floor. He raised a trap-door and backward, as one would descend a ladder, he stepped downward three steps. He reached for the barrel and stepped down three more steps into a dark hole half filled with empty barrels. He rolled the barrel into a corner and ascended the steps. As he saw his employer, that individual turned and spat out: "You ain't got no guts."

Mr. Bodkin felt no resentment. He shrugged his shoulders and replied, as before: "Perhaps you are right."

Sam swore forcibly and loudly.

"Won't nothin' make you hit back?"

Mr. Bodkin did not deem it necessary to reply. Exasperation was in the storekeepers' voice.

"You've seen how I treat 'em? Teamsters, stage-drivers, Injuns, all of 'em? You've seen me? None of 'em come in here lookin' fer trouble that don't find it, do they? And I get along, don't I?"

Mr. Bodkin agreed that he did.

"The difference between me and you," Sam continued, "is I've got guts. There ain't no man can out-bully me. Looky here. See them nicks on thet gun. Thet's men thet ol' shootin' iron has killed, bad men too. An' I did it without nobody a-helpin'. I'm a lone wolf, I am, and never join up with nobody less'n I got some idea in mind. Take this store fer instance—know how I got the money to start it?"

Mr. Bodkin shook his head as he felt he was expected to do. Sam leaned forward and almost whispered: "Me and three other bad hombres robbed a stage-coach."

Mr. Bodkin was not surprised but he widened his eyes as if he might be. Sam warmed under the sun of admiration and divulged more of his past.

"Yes, sir, me and Jake and Slim and thet feller named Green-eye who was just in here held up the—never mind what stage—it was a long way from here and when I got my share it wasn't big enough to suit me, so know what I done?"

Mr. Bodkin shook his head. Sam continued.

"I made them three bad hombres reach fer the sky and I took their shares too. Yes, sir, I'm a lone wolf, I am, an' I got guts."

Sam fingered his six-gun fondly.

"An' some day if I don't miss my bet, this bad hombre named Jake is gonna happen along here and when he sees me he's gonna be right perturbed an' there'll be a little shootin'. An' what'll you do with nary a gun an' not even a pint of guts? What'll you do, huh?"

Mr. Bodkin was an inoffensive young man, but truthful. He replied, "I shall probably faint."

Sam stared at him for a long minute before ejaculating: "Gawd! what a man. Gimme a drink."

MR. BODKIN walked behind the bar and set out a bottle and glass. Sam gulped his liquor and was reaching for the bottle when he stopped and whispered: "Listen! Hear anything?"

Both listened intently. Mr. Bodkin shook his head. Sam explained.

"Thought I heard some hosses."

Loosening his pistol in its holster he strode to the door and looked out into the star-filled night.

"Kinda shade thet candle, will you, Rabbit? I can't see nothin'."

Mr. Bodkin held his towel before it. Sam spoke in a worried voice.

"Seems like I c'n hear somebody a-walkin'. I c'n hear spurs a-jinglin'. Put out thet candle. I don't want nobody potshottin' me."

Mr. Bodkin obediently extinguished the candle and stood in the darkness. He heard his employer pass through the door and step on the porch. There was a moment's wait, while the night wind of the prairie blew through the open door and out the open window at the back, then a sudden flash and roar. There was another wait and then his employer's voice.

"Rabbit, come here."

Mr. Bodkin reluctantly stumbled around the bar and out to the porch. He could feel more than see that his employer was pointing.

"See that black hump over there at the side of the trail? Go see what it is."

"But sir, I'm sure it is nothing."

"If yer so sure, what you 'fraid of? Go see."

"But sir, I don't think it necessary, I—"

A harsh note leaped into Sam's voice.

"You git out there an' see what thet is."

Mr. Bodkin felt the barrel of the gun press into his side and discretion bade him brave the unknown danger of the hump in the road rather than the known danger of the pistol. He walked rapidly out to the road, hurrying before his courage left him, knelt, felt and returned.

"It is a sage bush, sir."

"Humph!" was Sam's reply. "Must be gittin' a case of the jumps. All right, go in an' light the candle."

WITH Sam at his heels the obedient Mr. Bodkin entered the store and struck a light to the candle. As the yellow flame lit up the room he sucked in his breath in terrified surprise. A counterpart of Sam, gun out, stood just inside the window. With unbelievable quickness Sam leaped, whirled and drew. The intruder's gun roared. Mr. Bodkin's eyes saw Sam's weapon fly from his hand and clatter to the floor.

Quiet came as quickly as it had been shattered. Mr. Bodkin knew he was white and trembling and wondered why he had not fainted. The two principals seemed calm.

"Hullo, Sam," the newcomer drawled.

"Hullo, Jake," Sam replied. "How come yuh didn't shoot me?"

Jake's face grew terrible in its hatred.

"Shootin's too good fer a double crosser."

He whistled softly. Instantly there were steps on the porch, the door opened and two men, one of them Green-eye, entered. He glanced at Mr. Bodkin and swung his gun toward him.

"Put 'em up, sister."

Sam spoke disgustedly.

"You don't need to pay no 'tention to him, Green-eye. He ain't got no guts."

Jake's eyes roamed about the little store.

"Got any coal-oil, Sam?"

"Yes, what you aimin' to do?"

"Got a nice lighted candle there thet's right handy, too." He walked to the trap-door as if he had a plan already in mind and threw it up. "You two hombres just vamoose down them stairs real pronto. See?"

"Jake, what you aimin' to do?"

There was only half concealed alarm in Sam's voice.

"What you aimin' to do?" he repeated as he backed toward the trap-door.

"Burn you," Jake answered in a matter-of-fact way. "Burn you so you'll be used to it 'fore you git to where you're goin'."

Sam brought his hands down in a pleading gesture.

"Not thet, Jake, not thet. Shoot me or stretch my neck but don't burn me like a dirty Injun."

Jake's eyes were terrible in their steadiness.

"You git down thet hole 'fore I puncture thet ornery hide of yourn."

Sam straightened.

"Go ahead, puncture it. I ain't a-goin' down thet hole to be burned by a—"

Jake jerked his head in a commanding gesture and his two henchmen seized the obstinate Sam, caught him off his balance and sent him clattering and sprawling down the steps.

"You next, sister."

"But I have done nothing to warrant your punishing me," Mr. Bodkin protested.

While a cold wave of dread went over him, Mr. Bodkin gazed into Jake's uncompromising eyes and heard Jake drawl: "You been teamin' with Sam, ain't yuh? Thet's enough. Git down thet hole."

Without another word Mr. Bodkin backed down the steps. The trap-door closed with a bang. There was a heavy rumbling and shuffling of feet as the men above pushed a counter over the door. Mr. Bodkin saw Sam, in the dim light coming through the cracks in the floor, crawl up the stairs and thump on the trap-door.

"JAKE, Jake! Fer Gawd's sake don't burn me—gimme a gun to shoot myself with. Please, Jake, don't let yer old pard die a-burnin'. Please gimme a gun."

There was a note of dread in Sam's voice that sent a shiver through Mr. Bodkin's body. He could not believe that the outlaws would really burn them, or even kill them; that would be terrible. But Sam seemed so sure of it, so deadly sure that he was begging for the chance to commit suicide rather than burn. Mr. Bodkin shivered again.

Jake's snarling voice answered Sam.

"Yuh ain't got the guts to shoot yerself."

"Yuh gimme a gun an' I'll show yuh."

There was a heavy rumble as the counter was rolled back from the door. Sam's upturned face was lighted for an instant as the trap-door was raised high enough to shove a six-gun through. Sam reached for it. The hand that held it dropped it and the heavy weapon bumped down the stairs to the ground. Sam followed it, groping in the darkness.

"All right, you two," came Jake's voice. "I'll give yuh ten to take yer choice o' shootin' yerselves or burnin'. One!"

Mr. Bodkin stooped, picked up the gun and handed it to his employer. Sam thrust it back at him.

"You first, Rabbit."

Mr. Bodkin shrank against the wall. He raised a hand and pushed the gun aside. With a throat suddenly dry he whispered: "No, no, not that. Not that."

"Two," counted Jake.

Sam's voice was a sneer.

"You ain't got the guts."

The old familiar insult brought back Mr. Bodkin's poise. He straightened, shrugged his shoulders in the darkness and answered: "Perhaps you are right, but I can't believe they intend to burn us."

“Three!” Jake counted above.

“You don’t know Jake. That’s all I got to say. But me—I’ve got guts—my time’s come—I know it. I’m goin’ out with my boots on. If yuh don’t think I got guts jest feel my hand. Steady ain’t it?”

Mr. Bodkin extended his own trembling fingers and met Sam’s hand. It was as steady as if death was the farthest thing from the owner’s thoughts.

“Steady ain’t it?” Sam asked.

“Yes, sir,” Mr. Bodkin answered, “but don’t—don’t—shoot. There must be a way out of this. There must be a way, if we can only find it.”

“Four! Jake counted and jeered. “Ain’t got the guts, have yuh, Sam?”

“I’ll show yuh,” Sam answered wrathfully and cursed his captor. “I’ll show yuh.”

“But wait, wait,” Mr. Bodkin begged, “there must be a—”

“Oh, git away from me,” Sam snarled. “Yuh lady-fingered, white-livered coward. Git away from me, I got guts.”

Mr. Bodkin heard him cock the gun and walk behind the stairs. As the flash and roar came he shoved his fist in his mouth to stifle the scream that sprang into his throat.

“Five!” Jake counted and added, “one gone.”

IN A frenzy Mr. Bodkin tore at the earthen walls with his fingers. The dirt flew. He reached into his pocket for his pocket-knife. He stabbed at the wall. The blade snapped. At the sound of it, the utter hopelessness of attempting to dig out struck him into coolness.

“Six!” came Jake’s voice. “Git me the oil, Slim.”

“I wonder if I’ve got the—the—guts,” Mr. Bodkin whispered, “I wonder if I have.”

Slowly he made his way to the stairs, past them and behind them. He stood fascinated. There was a spot of light on the floor. In that spot lay the six-gun. His hand trembled as he reluctantly reached for the weapon. His fingers closed over it and lifted it. The spot of light was gone.

“Seven!” Jake said and “thanks, Slim.”

Mr. Bodkin looked up through the knothole that had caused the spot of light. He saw Jake’s head intercepting the rays of the candle. The face was in shadow, but a shadow that accentuated rather than softened the cruel lines at the corners of the mouth and down the cheeks. Mr. Bodkin looked long at those lines, trying to read the purpose in the robber’s mind. There could be no doubt about it, he meant to set fire to the pile above. The thin cruel mouth, the nostrils that quivered, the eyes that gleamed, all proved it. Even now Mr. Bodkin could hear oil trickling through the cracks of the floor.

“Eight!” Jake called; and in one last fruitless effort Mr. Bodkin ranged around the cellar again trying to find a way out. He stumbled over the body of his employer who had had “guts.” “I don’t want to do it —I don’t want to do it,” he moaned over and over again. He looked up through the knothole and saw and heard Jake say,

“Nine! Looks like this hombre wants to burn. Slim, git me thet candle.”

Mr. Bodkin heard the footsteps of Slim going behind the bar, heard them returning and screamed:

“Don’t you do it. Don’t you dare do it.”

He saw Jake’s face, brighter now as the candle came nearer, instantly change into cruel glee. There was the note of an exultant animal in his voice.

“Lis’en to him. Lis’en to the coyote howl. Won’t he howl in a minute, though, when the fire gits to lickin’ at him. Maybe he’ll have guts enough to shoot then. Gimme thet candle.”

Mr. Bodkin saw Jake reach for the candle. He raised the pistol with as steady a hand as any gun-fighter ever knew. Jake opened his mouth to count “ten” and Mr. Bodkin fired—straight through the knothole into that mouth.

There was a dull thud, surprised oaths, a hissing whisper.

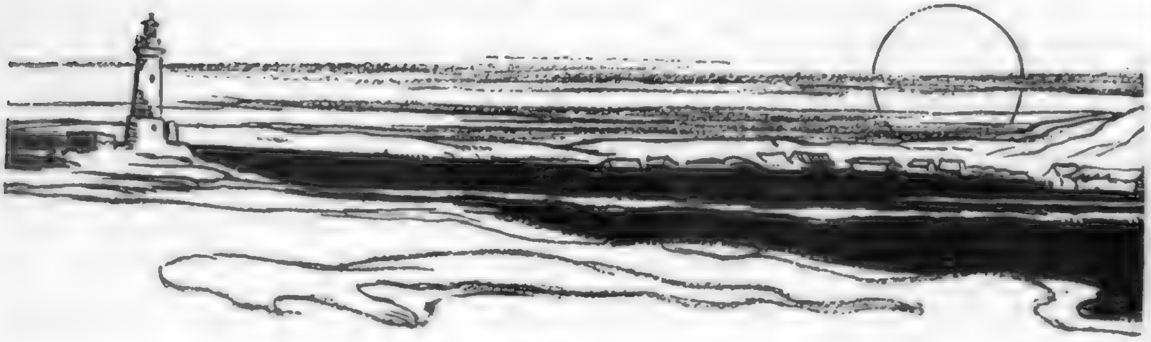
“Put out thet candle, he c’n see us.”

Instantly there was darkness. Cautious footsteps moved over the floor. Placing himself beneath them Mr. Bodkin fired again. He heard a cry of pain, a second thud, a groan. “Green-eye, he got me; help”; an answer, “To hell with you,” and retreating footsteps out the door.

Mr. Bodkin lamenting, “I didn’t want to do it,” sat down on the bottom step to wait for help.

Del Rio PEACHES

A Novelette of Gun Running and a Toy Revolution



TWILIGHT was beginning to fall as the rusty tramp steamer, *Gloria*, thrust her battered nose out from the lee of Sandy Hook and lifted to the first of the long Atlantic swells.

A red haired man with powerful arms left fully exposed by his ragged, oil stained singlet, came up the steel ladder from the engine room and walked forward along the starboard alleyway. When he reached the open deck amidships he felt for the first time the cool sting of the sea breeze and saw the many lights of the Jersey shore twinkling faintly across the wide, gray water. Sea gulls, dipping and circling above the ship, cried in a plaintive chorus and the steady voice of the lookout floated aft from the fo'castle head, reporting a light on the port bow.

The red haired engineer paused at the rail, breathing deeply of the salty air, his body yielding easily to the roll of the ship. Upon a sudden impulse he inflated his chest to its fullest extent and flexed his arms so that the muscles crawled and knotted beneath the grimy skin. For a moment he held the pose, a heroic figure in the dim light. Then he relaxed, chuckled to himself and went on sedately up the ladder to the bridge.

Captain Horace Chenoweth was alone on the open starboard wing at the moment, the chief officer having gone into the chart room to make an entry in the log. The engineer stopped beside him and rested both elbows on the forward rail.

"Well, Duke," he inquired companionably, "how's she goin'?"

The captain laughed softly. He was a dark haired young man, slenderly built, but tough as a steel foil and full of a harsh, nervous energy that seemed always half suppressed.

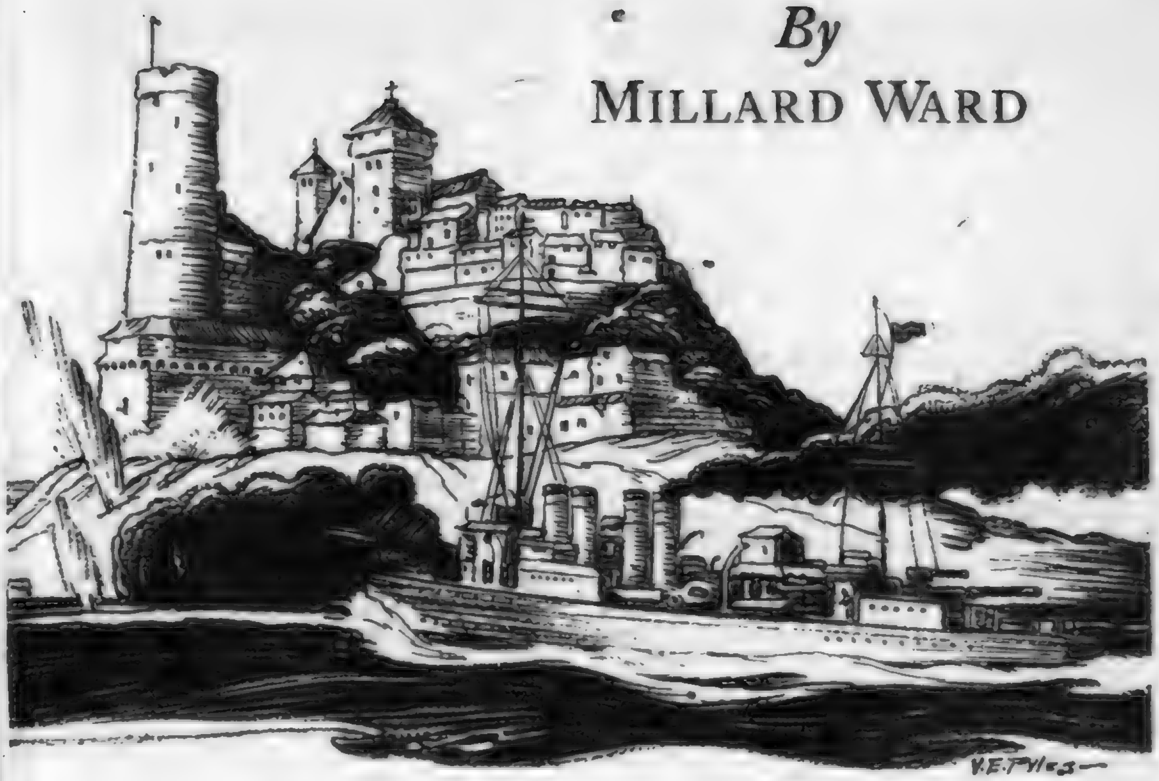
"Going fine, Bill. She's old and slow but she's a ship and that's all I ask. Lord! Isn't it good to be at sea again?"

The engineer nodded. "You tell 'em, Duke. We'd been laying around quite a while. Still, we couldn't expect to find a ship the day we got our tickets. Pure stroke of luck when Mr. Mendez, who's our owner now, asked me about gettin' a skipper and chief for this ship. It's only for a trip, of course, but you have to admit the pay is good, and anyway, it's better than nothing. Good thing to make a trip on those new tickets of ours, too."

"Funny idea, though," said Chenoweth thoughtfully, "for Mendez to charter a whole ship, little and slow as she is, just to

By

MILLARD WARD



take a few hundred tons of farm implements and canned goods down to Central America. Should think he'd save money sending it on a regular liner."

"The fact is, Duke, I've got an idea that these are kinda funny canned goods. What Mendez said to me was that he wanted a couple of men who didn't give a damn for anything to take this cargo down there. I figured that meant you and me. I figured, too, that in cases of this sort the fewer questions asked the better. We don't want to know nothin' about nothin', see? We're just poor sailormen tryin' to make a livin'. Nothin' more."

The captain took off his uniform cap, allowing the breeze to run its light fingers through his hair, and fixed his eyes on the sea ahead.

"Maybe that explains why we're not to take this cargo right into San Lorenzo. Orders are to make for an inlet about twenty miles up the beach from the harbor. They're going to lighter the stuff ashore."

BILL spat carefully to leeward. "Well, whenever you fool around Central America, you got to look for funny things. This here Republic of San Lorenzo is one of the funniest of 'em all. They got a dictator and a president, each with his own gang, raisin' hell down there. Dictator is General Luis Rosalva and the president is Don Manuel Diego de Morgante y Tierra Blanca, last named bein' quite a swell. Anyhow General Rosalva is on top just now and the president is in the fortress at San Lorenzo with a fine chance of standin' up against a brick wall. Mr. Mendez told me all this before I got in touch with you. What was left of the president's gang, Whites, they call 'em, after the dictator and his Blues won their victory, got away into the jungle. It's them we're goin' to do business with now."

Chenoweth shook his head. "It's a crazy business. I've been around down there before and seen a bit of affairs like this. It'd be funny if it wasn't so damn tragic."

"Oh, well, it ain't our quarrel. We were lucky to get a job at all. We ain't likely to get mixed up in the political end of the game, but if we do, why, what the hell's the difference?"

Chenoweth took a turn across the stumpy wing of the bridge, three steps out and three steps back.

"What kind of men have you got down below, Bill?"

The engineer scratched the back of his

neck and reflected. "Fairish, Duke. Six niggers in the stoke-hold and three Irishmen oilin'. Blake and Jarvis, the assistants, is good men, too. How 'bout the deck?"

"Short handed. Four A. B. seamen, all Swedes, two mates and myself. I'm taking the eight to twelve watch. Counting the cook and steward, that's twenty-one men, all told. Mendez was going to send a supercargo, but when he found I spoke Spanish, he decided not to."

"You do savvy Spanish, don't you? I'd forgotten that."

"Yes, I picked up a good deal knocking around here and there and I've studied it out of books. Comes in handy."

The engineer nodded without replying. By this time the summer night had become quite dark, the long rows of lights on shore twinkling brightly, and a big, yellow star tracing a narrow path of brilliance across the sea ahead.

Presently the wheelhouse bell clanged sharply and Bill stood erect. "There it goes, Duke. One bell." He sighed regretfully. "Break my neck to get back to sea and as soon as I do, I don't want to work. Well, good night, Skipper."

"Good night, Chief."

The engineer swung easily down the ladder and disappeared in the darkness amidships. A few minutes later eight bells struck, the wheel and lookout were relieved and the chief mate came out on the bridge. This officer was a short, thickset man with graying hair and a low, deliberate voice. He was often seen around South Street in New York, and there was a rumor that he had lost a fine ship years before.

"South by east, half east, sir," he reported. "Nothing in sight."

"Very well, Mr. Carlson. South by east, half east. We shall want to get washed down tomorrow, I think. There's no paint on board, but we can at least keep clean."

"Yes, sir," replied the mate evenly. "I intended to have it done." Then, after a moment's silence, "Good night, sir."

"Good night, Mr. Carlson."

The captain, left alone on the bridge, moved out to the extreme wing and leaned back against the after rail. A deep contentment filled him and he found himself for almost the first time thinking of himself and the ship and the ocean as integral parts of a tremendous whole. He felt that he could move the ship about the ocean as easily as a checker on a board, and when he shifted his body slightly to one side he was almost surprised that the ship did not change her course with him. He lost himself in the ship, the ship in the ocean, and the ocean—well, of course no one could be sure about that.

The green running light glowed steadily at his side, and after a time a great, round moon rose above the sand dunes of New Jersey. The ancient *Gloria* waddled comfortably southward hour after hour beneath a low and friendly sky.

THE long run down the Atlantic coast passed uneventfully. Although Chenoweth and Johnson were making their first voyage as captain and chief engineer, no one living on board the little steamer would ever have suspected it. The engines ran better every day, while the decks and rigging gradually took on an appearance of shipshape tautness unknown to them for years. When, on the evening of the eighth day from New York, the *Gloria* swung close in to the shore of Florida, a seaman remarked that the bathers in the warm surf would doubtless mistake her for a millionaire's yacht.

After two days and nights of coasting along the edge of the reefs, during which Chenoweth slept scarcely at all, the ship laid Key West on the starboard quarter and swung off for the Yucatan Channel. The sun was now almost directly overhead at noon and its power was terrific. All hands spent their watches beneath an awning on the open deck, for the quarters had become unendurable. Even Bill Johnson admitted that four hours in the engine room with the thermometer at one hundred and thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit was enough for him.

Two more days and nights saw the flashing light of Cape San Antonio abeam and the last lap of the outward voyage begun.

The Caribbean Sea, though a great deal bluer than the Gulf of Mexico, was not a bit cooler, and the ship's company continued to swelter during the rest of the run southward. At the rate at which the *Gloria* was travelling, Chenoweth calculated that she would reach the appointed spot on the coast of San Lorenzo at about ten o'clock on the evening of the third day from Cape San Antonio. But, being uncertain of pilotage and not wishing to lie all night off an unknown shore, he gave orders to cut the already insignificant speed. Thus, it was not until the morning of the fourth day that the rugged, green shore line of San Lorenzo appeared ahead. When Chenoweth took the bridge for his watch from eight to twelve, the land was, he judged, four or five miles away and still quite dim and misty.

The *Gloria* was registered from the port of San Lorenzo, so, having made his landfall, the captain ordered the gay blue and white ensign to be hoisted at the stern. With his own hands, he ran up on the signal halliards above the bridge the private code flags given him by the owner, and stood in confidently for the coast.

Meanwhile a smudge of smoke which had been for some minutes visible on the southeastern horizon had grown very much blacker and nearer. So, after hoisting the flags, Captain Chenoweth went into the pilot house for a pair of binoculars with which to investigate.

Through the glasses he saw that the stranger was a small, gray steamer with two sharply raking funnels. She was approaching at a speed which in a cargo vessel would have been astounding. Of narrow beam and low freeboard, he could already see the white curl of her bow wave and make out the graceful lines of her deck. A moment later he started and rested both elbows on the bridge rail for greater steadiness of the binoculars. During the better part of a minute he gazed levelly at the approaching vessel, then lowered the glasses and stepped to the engine room speaking tube.

His preliminary whistle being answered, he put his lips close to the mouthpiece and spoke distinctly: "That you, chief? Listen. We're about four miles out from that inlet we're going to. There's a little gray ship coming up from the eastward about twenty knots an hour. She's heading right for us and she's got at least two four-inch guns mounted forward. If we can get out of her way, I'd like to do it."

Excitement was plain in the voice from below. "I'll put the fear of the devil in them nigger firemen and open her up wide. What she ain't makin' in ten minutes, she never will make. No surrender, Duke."

WHEN the captain went out to the wing of the bridge again he could plainly see the mouth of the inlet shown on the chart. Through the glasses he could make out a signal similar to his own flying from halliards ingeniously rigged to a tall tree on the shore nearby. Turning toward the port side, he saw also, with a queer thrill of alarm, that the gray stranger was no more than half a mile away and already swinging into a course converging with that of the lumbering *Gloria*.

As he watched her apprehensively, there was a vivid flash on her forward deck, followed by a sound like the slamming of an iron door, and a shell screamed fairly across the bow of the freighter. The range was short and the gunnery excellent, so Chenoweth bothered no longer about any inlet. Inside the pilot house in a stride, he slapped the engine room telegraph over to "Stop," and returned to the speaking tube to answer the protesting squawk from below.

"Yes, I meant it," he snapped impatiently. "Stop! S-t-o-p! And be pretty damn quick about it. Your miserable eight knots is no good. Our little friend is getting ready to blow us out of the water."

He waited a moment while the drumming of the ship's engines died away, then spoke again. "That's right. Now I think we're going to get some of those politics you were looking for."

The *Gloria* had lost way entirely and lay, rolling gently, in the trough of the sea. The gray gunboat drew slowly toward her until the distance between them was no more than two hundred yards. Then she stopped her engines and lowered away a boat from the davits amidships. Chenoweth, waiting on the bridge of the freighter, could see the brilliant colors of military uniforms on the deck of the newcomer and make out the name, traced in gold with much scroll work, along her flaring bow, *Santissima Trinidad*.

"Most Holy Trinity, eh?" he muttered to himself. "That's a hot one. I'll bet she's not very far from a pirate."

The boat which the stranger had lowered was a small motor launch, laden with eight or ten birds of paradise who appeared to be marines. In a very few minutes it swept under the bows of the rusty tramp and came about in a graceful arc to the lee side. Chenoweth mustered his fiercest scowl, leaned down from the rail and hailed in Spanish.

"What is the meaning of this outrage? You fire upon a peaceful vessel on the high seas."

A lanky officer in the stern sheets of the launch sneered contemptuously. "Damned Blanco," he retorted, thereby complimenting Chenoweth's accent, "*contrabandista*, traitor, send down a ladder quickly."

The greater part of the crew of the freighter had gathered in an interested knot amidships, and at Chenoweth's reluctant order, a pilot ladder clattered promptly over the side.

The officer led the ascent, his sword and accoutrements jingling loudly, and swung his long body over the rail to the deck. The squad of marines, each armed with a modern rifle and sheathed bayonet, followed closely behind and formed in a menacing line at his back.

"As captain of this ship," persisted Chenoweth with a bold front, "I protest once more against this infamous conduct. On what authority do you act?"

The crew of the ship, being unable to make head or tail of the flurry of excited Spanish, grinned and nudged each other slyly.

This seemed to infuriate the officer, who flushed darkly. "On the authority of General Luis Rosalva, Dictator of San Lorenzo. His many ears have told him of a cargo of arms for the accursed Whites. We have been ready for you for days." He made a sudden gesture, at which a sergeant of marines stepped to his side. "Señor Capitano, you are under arrest."

At this, Chenoweth began to laugh. "A thousand pardons, Lieutenant, but the cat has watched the wrong hole. Here you have only a few hundred tons of canned goods and farming tools. If there is a cargo of arms, it is doubtless safe ashore some miles from here."

The lieutenant hesitated a moment, then without turning his head, snapped a command. "Fix bayonets."

A low rattling of scabbards followed and the sun glinted on a line of polished steel. The marines looked villainously ready to attack.

"Now, Señor Capitano," sneered the officer, "we shall see. Of your men here, one moves at his peril. Meanwhile—" He jerked a glance at the black mustachioed sergeant—"Gonzales, go into the hold and fetch up one case of these innocent canned goods. And sergeant," he added satirically, "be careful not to drop it."

SERGEANT GONZALES disappeared around the forward house and the men amidships waited in grim silence. There were no more than two revolvers in the whole of the little ship, so there was no thought of resistance. The gunboat, too, lay very close, her guns trained upon pilot house and bridge.

After a while Gonzales reappeared, sweat pouring down his swarthy face in streams and his bright uniform spotted with dust. On his shoulder he carried a raw, wooden box, stenciled "Superfine Del Rio Peaches" but evidently heavy beyond all reason.

After easing his burden down upon a corner of the bunker hatch, he stepped back and saluted. "There are many, perhaps five hundred, the same as this. Others, too, but larger."

"Very well," replied the officer. Then, pointing impatiently, "Come. A bayonet. Have it open."

A marine stepped forward, rifle poised, there was a ripping and splintering of wood and a board flew off the top of the box, exposing a thin layer of sawdust inside. The officer thrust a sinewy hand into the opening, fumbled a moment and with an exclamation of triumph drew out a long, khaki bandoleer full of very efficient looking metal jacketed bullets.

With one stride he crossed to where Chenoweth was standing. The captain of the freighter was staring down at the box in well simulated amazement, but the lieutenant laughed harshly and thrust the bandoleer directly under his nose.

"Aha! You are surprised, Señor Capitano? You are surprised? Canned goods, it seems, is ammunition, and farming tools, no doubt, machine guns. Peaches of the river! Very good. Are you fond of peaches, Capitano?" His thin lips drew back viciously. "It is very likely that you shall have some of your own peaches to eat before breakfast."

He shook the bandoleer so that the dull colored cartridges clinked together. "Sergeant Gonzales, the handcuffs for the Señor Capitano."

The sergeant stepped forward quickly, and, as the officer menaced Chenoweth with the point of his sword, snapped a pair of heavy irons over his wrists. An angry murmur ran through the knot of watching seamen and several of them started forward, only to give way again before the bayonets of the Blue marines.

"Now," said the lieutenant to his men, "we shall tie up the rest of these sons of polecats with heavy ropes. Vaco, go to find ropes. The rest keep close watch. If one man stirs a hand, run him through."

The sailors waited helplessly, scowling and muttering. Chenoweth, at the officer's side, stood with bowed head, his face a dull red and the sun glinting brightly from the handcuffs on his wrists. Presently Vaco returned with a coil of light manila line, which he turned over to Sergeant Gonzales. Then, one at a time, the crew of the freighter were shoved forward and trussed like fowls, their hands behind their backs and feet hobbled eighteen inches apart. The last man of them all was Bill Johnson, who had been on duty in the engine room. His blue eyes smouldered wrathfully as he was prodded along, but he submitted to the bonds as the others had, because there was no help for it.

Then, the job being finished, and feeling, perhaps, that some special celebration was called for, Sergeant Gonzales gave him a violent shove. The hobbles on his legs tripped him and he went down in a heap against a steam winch, scraping and bruising his body severely. The engineer drew himself slowly to his feet, and, his eyes mere slits fixed upon the sergeant's face, said deliberately, "Ye low scut."

The words were probably meaningless to Gonzales but there was no mistaking the tone, and, in sudden fury, he struck the prisoner a stinging blow across the face with his open hand. "Yankee pig," he snarled, "filthy—" His words ended in an inarticulate gurgle. Johnson's hard muscles had tensed, wrenching the line from his wrists, and his two hands joined about the sergent's throat.

The lieutenant watched a moment, laughing. Then, as Gonzales' face went purple, he unhooked the heavy scabbard from his belt and aimed a quick, whiplike slash at the back of Johnson's neck. Had it landed, it must certainly have killed him, but in the struggle the engineer lurched forward and the scabbard took him a glancing blow on the side of the head. He went down like a bullock, slid off the bunker hatch and crumpled up on deck.

"*Madre de Dios!*" exclaimed the officer. "He is lucky. I shall not trouble to kill him now." Then, turning his head, "Ah, Sergeant, you are better? Good. Let us send these unruly prisoners on board the *Trinidad* where they can be more strictly guarded. As for this decrepit tub, it would be well to take the cargo out of her and send her to the bottom. I myself shall make a report to the captain. Gonzales, take charge, but no killing if avoidable."

HE TURNED and walked to the starboard rail. There, noticing the ship's accommodation ladder, which was kept rigged for use but hauled up level with the deck and lashed fast, he came to a halt.

"José! Arco!" he called to two of the marines. "Come here and let down this ladder. The rope thing there is very well for sailors and monkeys but I do not like it."

He waited with his hand resting on the hilt of his sword, while the ladder creaked down to the water. The launch still lay alongside, the two Blue seamen of its crew seated comfortably in the stern, and when the lieutenant appeared at the rail, they sprang up and worked it forward to the foot of the ladder.

The officer then swaggered down and stepped aboard. The gasoline engine sputtered loudly, and a moment later the launch had cleared the stern of the freighter and was heading back for the *Santissima Trinidad*.

The crew of the *Gloria*, penned against the rail amidships, stared sullenly at the long bayonets of Gonzales' men and remained quiet. At the side of the bunker hatch Bill Johnson still sprawled limply on the deck. He had not moved a muscle since the blow that felled him, and when the sergeant, passing close by, drove a heavy foot into his body, no quiver betrayed life or feeling. A cold breath of fear swept over Chenoweth at the sight. "Bill must be in a bad way," he thought.

Then, raising his head, he spoke to Gonzales in Spanish. "For God's sake, Sergeant, do not maltreat an injured man. I beg that you will remove these shackles for a time, so that I may attempt to revive him."

Gonzales snarled venomously, "The Yankee pig shall lie where he has fallen. If he is dead, so much the better. For you, keep silent, or you shall join him there."

After a while the launch returned to the foot of the gangway, carrying, besides the lieutenant of marines, a squad of armed seamen and two men in the white and gold of naval officers. The whole party climbed to the deck where the ranking naval officer began to give rapid fire orders. In obedience, the Blue seamen swarmed up the battered ladders to the boatdeck of the *Gloria*, where they removed the covers, knocked down the blocks and swung out the two lifeboats. They then lowered away and brought the boats around to the foot of the gangway with the motor launch.

"Now," said the naval officer in English to the crew of the freighter, "embark in the first boat. If you fall overboard, it is your own lookout."

Balancing themselves against the roll of the ship and urged on by the prodding bayonets of the marines, a long line of prisoners went down the ladder and tumbled into the nearest boat, many scrapes and bruises resulting from their pinioned arms. Last of all came two Blue sailors carrying the limp body of Bill Johnson. The engineer was heavy and they made very hard work of the trip, but they reached the bottom safely and dumped their burden into the lifeboat. Then, though the craft was already crowded, a guard of four marines sprang aboard and stationed themselves in the bow and stern sheets. The painter was cast off from the gangway and made fast to the stern of the launch, which was to act the part of a tug. Then the two boats set off for the *Santissima Trinidad*.

Although the swell was sufficient to keep the ships from venturing very close together, the sea was not rough and the tow moved along at a good rate of speed. Amidships in the lifeboat, at the farthest point from the guards, Chenoweth was sitting dejectedly on a thwart. A wonderful end for his first command! Perhaps a term in a filthy prison, just possibly a brick wall and a firing squad. Also, at his very feet, lay the bruised, unconscious form of Bill Johnson. His eyes dropped to the rumpled red hair and still face on the bottom boards. He'd been out a good while now. Then Chenoweth straightened up with a convulsive jerk and bit his tongue violently. One of Johnson's blue eyes had opened and closed swiftly, an unmistakable wink! The engineer was conscious and probably had been from the first.

There was no time to communicate further, however, for at that moment some one hailed the boat loudly and, looking up, Chenoweth saw that they had almo reached the *Santissima Trinidad*. Th accommodation ladder was creaking dow and seamen and marines were standing b at the rail.

FIVE minutes later the prisone were mustered in a sullen, bewildere group on the main deck of the Bl gunboat. Looking back, Chenoweth cou see the *Gloria* already showing signs o hurried activity. The hatches fore and a had been opened, steam winches we whizzing and banging and men were passi back and forth along her rail. Prepari to transfer the cargo, using lifeboats fo lighters, he concluded.

Meanwhile, on the deck of the gunboa there was some confusion also. A bearde man in white, evidently the captain, wa arguing with a man in military uniform beside the door to the wardroom, their hand flying incessantly and the air full of highl religious oaths.

Hard as he tried, Chenoweth was unabl to understand their words and was none th wiser when the soldier apparently carrie his point and the two came down the dec together.

Here another flurry of orders was give and seamen and marines gathered from a parts of the ship. A door was thrown ope and the prisoners marshalled through i into a sort of lazaret beneath the dec Bill Johnson alone was left lying in a hea where he had been dumped just inside th rail. Seeing him there, a marine spoke t Sergeant Gonzales who had returned to th gunboat in the launch.

"That man there, sergeant. Shall w throw him into the lazaret with th others or carry him to sick bay?"

Gonzales grinned evilly. "Neither, m friend; leave him where he is so that may kick him from time to time." Agai his foot drove into Johnson's body produ ing not the slightest quiver and the sergea turned away in disgust.

The lifeboat from the *Gloria*, meanwhil as well as the motor launch, had been loade heavily with newly mustered sailors an marines and was ready for the return trip.

"I leave the prisoners to you, sergeant, shouted an officer from the boat. "Yo have the key to the lazaret and two me on guard. "They'll be safe enough."

After the departure of the launch, th

Santissima Trinidad seemed very quiet and deserted. The captain went back to his cabin, the few seamen who had been working about the deck finished their tasks and disappeared forward, while even the officer and quartermaster on the bridge retired to the shade of the chart room. Thus, only Sergeant Gonzales, his two sentries and the sprawling form of Bill Johnson remained in sight amidships.

Aft of the bridge and wardroom of the *Trinidad* was a long, narrow deck house divided into several compartments of which the one farthest forward served as a galley. The lazaret in which the prisoners were confined was still farther forward and below the main deck, but could be reached by means of a scuttle in the floor of the galley. This scuttle was now securely padlocked and the key in the keeping of Sergeant Gonzales. The outer door of the galley was fastened open, leaving the prisoners' only possible way of escape in full view of the sentries.

The galley itself was deserted, the cook and mess attendants being occupied by a card game in the steward's quarters. The stove, long table, pots and pans were all in their usual places, the only object of unusual appearance in the room being a huge bag of onions which sat just inside the door. It had not been opened as yet, and weighing, as it did, not far from two hundred pounds, gave a pointed lead as to the diet of the gunboat's crew.

On the deck outside, Gonzales lounged against the rail, watching the operations on board the *Gloria*.

"They are working hard, those over there," he remarked to one of the sentries. "Two-thirds of all our crew. The general said to the captain that he feared artillery from the accursed Whites on shore if we delayed too long and that is why so many men have gone. *Sangre de Cristo!* That is hot work!"

The tropic sun had been climbing rapidly in the cloudless sky, and now its fierce rays beating down upon the deck of the gunboat more than justified the sergeant's words.

By the rail, Bill Johnson still sprawled limply, not moving or making a sound though the sweat was pouring down his face in rivers. Presently Gonzales, who was also sweating profusely, looked furtively about and whispered to the two sentries.

"Wait you here, my children. It is necessary that I get a powder for my head. It aches unmercifully in the heat. Keep guard well, and afterward," he concluded with a meaning wink, "you shall each have a turn. Is it not so?"

The men nodded eager agreement, and the sergeant, after giving Johnson a parting kick, which as usual had no effect, strode away aft.

AS HE disappeared, the eyes of the man on deck opened to imperceptible slits. Close before him he saw a long, bony leg incased in coarse, blue trousers—another leg—two more. The sentries were standing close together with grounded rifles, their backs toward him and a bare three feet away.

Carefully, without the slightest noise, the engineer drew himself to his hands and knees. The deck was deserted on all sides and the broiling sentries thinking hopefully of ice cold beer. Then, with a scrambling drive forward, Johnson locked one arm about the knees of each marine and rose suddenly to his feet. The rifles slipped to the deck and their owners, going backward over Johnson's shoulders, followed them with violence. One landed on the top of his head on the steel plates, collapsed and was heard from no more. The other began to scramble to his feet, only to meet the butt of his own rifle in an unexpected reconciliation. He, too, lost interest and stretched out on deck. The engineer hauled them hastily out of the way, and then, hearing Gonzales' returning footsteps, dodged inside the galley and waited, empty handed.

The sergeant, returning to his post with a large quantity of cold beer beneath his accouterment belt but no headache powder, was surprised to find the deck apparently deserted. He looked about in a puzzled way, then thrust an inquiring head into the galley. A mouse, blundering into a round, red trap in search of cheese, must experience exactly the same sensation. There was no officer now to interfere, and the hands that locked suddenly about Gonzales' throat squeezed hard, thumbs driven into windpipe. Johnson's blue eyes were blazing directly into his own, and even in his panic stricken amazement he could see that there was no mercy in them.

He tried to call for help, emitting only a feeble gurgle, and wrenched at the vise-like fingers about his throat, without effect.

Spots began to dance before his eyes and the taste of sulphur was on his tongue; then he remembered his automatic pistol. It swung low at his side in a holster with a flap that buttoned. It was a heavy forty-five. His hand dropped to his side and jerked convulsively at the flap of the holster while the galley swung in dizzy arcs about him. His fingers closed about the hard, rough butt and it came out slowly. It seemed to weigh many, many pounds, the scarlet face before him grew misty and distorted, while a pointed iron burrowed into his throat. He was lifting the gun, pointing it—then a thick blackness full of waves of green rolled before his eyes and the automatic clattered unnoticed to the floor. After that there was nothing at all.

WHEN Johnson felt the sergeant's body go limp he allowed it to crumple up on the floor. Then, bending over, he fumbled in the pockets and brought out the key to the lazaret. A moment was all that was needed. The lock clicked open, the door flew up, and he was on hands and knees beside the opening. The little room below was quite dark and hot as a furnace, but he could see the dim forms of his shipmates huddled at the foot of the ladder.

"Below there," he called in a loud whisper. "Come up quick. I got the guards fixed. Quick, damn it, quick!"

The engineer caught up a sharp knife from the table at his back and as the prisoners tumbled obediently up the ladder, two quick slashes freed each of his bonds. Chenoweth, being in steel handcuffs, was completely out of the running, but very alert and eager. All twenty-one of the seamen remained concealed in the galley, while Johnson, who had retrieved Gonzales' automatic, ran through a hastily formed plan.

"Blake, Jarvis, Casey and you three firemen come with me down below. We'll easy knock over the watch and start the engines. Duke, you and the mates and sailors take them sentries' rifles and hold the bridge. Steer straight out to sea. We can fix any fellers left aboard after we get out of reach of that army corps on our ship. Ain't many left here, nohow."

The seamen, thus divided into two groups, left the galley by opposite doors. The engineer's crew was hardly on deck, however, before the loud *put put* of the returning gasoline launch sounded alm at the rail. Johnson stole a furious gla downward. There were six men on bo the little craft. Already one of them w reaching for the gangway with a boathoo

The engineer whirled, his eyes fell on t deserted galley, and he snarled an ord "Blake, take this gat and the men down b low and start the engines. Don't l nothin' stop you; I'm gonna be delayed."

The men obeyed without question, foll ing the assistant engineer in a comp body. On the deck amidships, Bill Johns had reached the galley door in two strid Bending down, he locked his arms ab the huge bag of onions, straightened a staggered toward the rail.

THE Blues at work upon the *Glor* had not noticed anything out of t way on board the gunboat; t launch was merely returning for some liqu refreshment for the officers. None t less the crew were armed and once on de could make trouble. The bag of onio was a terrific load for a single man a Johnson shuffled ahead clumsily, his fa contorted and breath whistling through h teeth.

Then all at once he was at the rail and h burden had fallen across it. For an insta he hesitated, making sure of his ma The seaman in the bow of the launch w was holding the boathook ready, glanc up at the moment, and seeing the teet ing bag just above him, sprang back w a shrill cry of alarm. Simultaneous Johnson let go.

The two hundred pounds of dead weig dropping a full ten feet, landed fairly on t bow of the little launch. The effect of t was to shoot the stern clear out of the wat catapulting the standing crew neatly o the gunwale into the sea. The craft its took water in a flood and swamped in t minutes.

Johnson, meanwhile, hauled up the a commodation ladder single handed. Th he leisurely crossed the deck, found t lifebuoys and tossed them down to t struggling, howling men in the water.

"And that," he said aloud, "is a da sight more than you would do for me."

The incident, however, had been o served from the *Gloria* and already he co see marines and seamen pouring down i the two lifeboats, preparing for a coun attack. He stood erect at the rail for a moment, watching interestedly but quite without concern.

Then all at once he heard a sharp *whap whap*! from the direction of the freighter and something said *chuck* against the rail at his waist and something else said *eeeee* quite close to his ear. The engineer dropped to his hands and knees.

"Why, th' dirty scuts," he exclaimed indignantly. "They're shootin' at *me*."

At the same time the deck beneath his hands quivered in an indescribably thrilling way and he could hear the faint hiss of water boiling up about the stern.

"That's Blake," he said aloud. "They can shoot their lousy heads off now." He went aft on hands and feet behind the bulwarks in the manner of a crab and dived into the engine room door.

Meanwhile Chenoweth and his men, after fastening the Blue captain into his room in passing, had taken the bridge without a struggle. Most of the crew left on board the gunboat were noncombatants while even the watch officer and quartermaster were caught in a lamentable state of unpreparedness.

From the pilot house Chenoweth saw the end of Bill's affair with the motor launch and watched him retire before the shots from the *Gloria*. Then, as the fusillade increased and the bullets began to hum about the bridge, the man who had been placed at the wheel suddenly began to pass the spokes through his hands.

"She steers, sir," he announced stolidly. "She hass got vay on her."

THE lifeboats from the other ship, Chenoweth saw from the window, were about half-way between the two and coming on rapidly, oars flashing in the sunlight and marines firing steadily from the sternsheets. The sharp bow of the *Santissima Trinidad*, however, was swinging rapidly out to sea. The powerful engines were already taking up their deep throated song and the captain felt a great surge of triumph through his body.

"Ease her," he said to the helmsman in a ringing voice. Then, "Steady! Steady as you go!"

As the last words left his mouth there was quick crash of glass at his side and a rifle bullet buried itself in one of the forward window frames. Chenoweth staggered back, blood streaming down his face and a long splinter of glass hanging from his right cheek.

"Damn 'em," he gasped. "That was a pretty shot but it's about the last they'll get at us."

The chief mate nodded. "Lucky it was no worse, sir." Then, as Chenoweth was unable to use his hands, Carlson and one of the men rendered first aid. The wound was only a gash through the fleshy part of the cheek and, though it bled profusely at first, was not very difficult to stanch. The pain was considerable but Chenoweth's excitement was so high that he paid it not the slightest attention.

The gunboat was now well on her way out to sea and from the doorway a man reported that the lifeboats had turned back toward the freighter and were picking up the men in the water. The next thing that suggested itself was a general mopping up of the ship. So, leaving the chief mate with a rifle and one man at the wheel, the captain, still handcuffed and with a strip of bloody signal bunting tied about his face, led the rest of his desperadoes below.

They were indifferently armed but the straggling Blues whom they encountered were not armed at all. Thus, no more than a quarter of an hour had passed before eighteen Blue prisoners, including the still dizzy Sergeant Gonzales and the thunderstruck captain, had been unceremoniously herded into the same lazaret which had held their captors and securely padlocked down. The crew of the *Gloria* were now undisputed masters of the pride of the dictator's navy.

Chenoweth posted guards inside the galley and returned to the bridge. The gunboat had been traveling all the while at high speed and the shore line of San Lorenzo had all but faded out astern.

"Hell," said the captain, "this won't do. We'll be back in New York in a few minutes and our cargo not delivered. Hard aport, Quartermaster."

The man spun the wheel rapidly, and, as the ship began to swing, Chenoweth stepped to the engine room speaking tube. He blew into it discreetly, because of his injured cheek. The call was answered at once by the voice of Bill Johnson.

"I'm turning back, Bill," said the captain decisively. "Have Blake slow her down a bit and you come up here. I want to talk to you."

A FEW minutes later, the ship being steadied on her new course, the big engineer on the bridge, grinning broadly and twirling a hack saw on one finger.

"Wait 'til I turn you loose, Duke, so you can make gestures while you talk."

"All right. These things do hamper me a little."

Chenoweth placed one hand on each side of the after rail, setting the handcuffs taut, while the engineer sawed methodically away.

"I searched my friend Gonzales for the key to these darbies," Bill remarked as he worked, "but he didn't have it. For the pesent I'll just saw this middle piece and you can wear the two bracelets 'til we have more time. What do you figure on doin' now, Duke?"

The captain had been watching him admiringly. The hack saw was biting steadily into the steel, but neither Johnson's breathing nor his voice was in the least affected by the labor.

"You're all man, Bill. Don't you ever get tired or out of wind?"

"Damn right. I was tired and out of wind both when I got them onions to the rail. I didn't feel none too good, neither, when I was layin' on them deck plates in the sun, prayin' for a chance to do something." The engineer's voice became more serious. "I guess I wouldn't be here now if anybody'd happened along while I was wrasslin' them fellers."

"Well, for that matter, I wouldn't be here, either," observed the captain with some penetration. "You gave 'em what they had coming to 'em, all right. Did Blake have any trouble in the engine room?"

Bill grinned complacently. "I reckon not. I never asked him no questions, but when I got down there he was workin' the throttle, and that oiler, Casey, with the automatic, and a big nigger fireman with a Stillson wrench, had the watch lined up against the vise bench, their hands in the air and quiet as any lambs."

At that moment the hack saw grated on the top of the rail and the captain's hands fell apart, freed.

"There," said Bill with satisfaction, "that'll do. But, as I asked a minute ago, what do you figure on doing with this marine oil stove now you've got it?"

Chenoweth stretched his arms and frowned. "Our job was to deliver th cargo on shore in a certain place. It st is our job to do it. I didn't want to g mixed up in this mess down here, as y know, but now we can't very well help it

"Sure," put in the engineer. "We g to be White or Blue now, and I, for o ain't no Blue."

"No, nor I. Well, then, how about this We'll keep on as we're going, heading bac toward that inlet. This ship draws n more than the other, so it will be easy enoug to get inside. There we'll pick up som White gunners and go out and take th old *Gloria* back again. That bunch on h has no artillery and they can't possib get away. Too slow. Then we can tur over prisoners, gunboat and all to the gar on shore and we'll be free to unload ou cargo. That'll keep us busy for a whi and there's no good looking too far ahead anyhow."

"Suits me, Duke. Them Blues deserv to lose their gunboat for bein' so dam smart with it. What I mean is, they cou 'a' tried to stop us without bein' so nast about it. We been in a mighty tight fix."

AFTER this, they stood for a while without speaking. Even at reduced speed the *Santissima Trinidad* made excellent time, and soon she passed the spo where she had first stopped the *Gloria*. Th dictator's men on board the freighter had in the meantime, been making the best of bad bargain by steaming away at a dejected five knots an hour toward the por of San Lorenzo.

"Catch them easy enough," commente Bill Johnson. "Lucky the old tub's go no radio or they might get help that way.

The shore line all the while was rushin up out of the water and soon the men on th bridge of the gunboat could make out th white foam of surf, breaking lazily along th rocky beach. The mouth of the inlet, however, was wide and calm, so Chenoweth cu the speed again and headed directly towar it. As they drew closer, the evidences o life on shore increased. There were boat drawn up on the beach inside, the sign still flew from the tall tree, and several thi columns of smoke were rising above th dense forest on the left. Of human being however, not one was in sight. Somewh puzzled, Chenoweth went into the pil house.

"Mr. Carlson," he directed the chief officer, who had remained on watch, "go forward and stand by the anchor. Take a couple of men with you to heave the lead."

"Yes, sir." The mate left the bridge immediately.

At the same time the vicious rattling of a machine gun sounded from a thicket on the east bank of the inlet and a hail of bullets ripped along the side of the gunboat. Fortunately the mate and his men had not reached the deck, and no one was injured by the first discharge.

"Now what the hell's wrong with them?" gasped Bill Johnson. Then he dived for the ladder. "I have it! That damned flag!"

The newly designed and very brilliant ensign of General Luis Rosalva still fluttered from the flagstaff astern, and, being uncertain as to what had happened off shore, the White gunners had let drive at it for luck. A moment later the engineer came out on the after deck, and during an ominous stillness from the thicket ashore, slashed the halliards and hauled down the dangerous flag. Then, with a flash of inspiration, he stripped off his singlet, by no means spotless but unmistakably white, bent it to the knotted halliards and hoisted it aloft.

After this there was no more firing and Bill Johnson returned to the bridge, bare to the waist, but easier in his mind. The chief mate was unconcernedly leaning over the rail at the bow watching the approaching shore line, now only a few hundred yards ahead. The cry of the leadsman floated aft from time to time, steady and unexcited.

"By the mark, eight!"

"And a half, seven!"

"By the deep, six!"

The high walls of bright green rose close alongside the gunboat, then she had entered the inlet and was creeping slowly forward through a world of marvelous loveliness. The indescribable odor of dense forests, steaming swamps, rare flowers and decaying vegetation swept over the ship with an overpowering effect. Even the shallow water was clear blue in the sunlight and the patches of white sand were dazzling to the eye. Ahead and on both sides was one unbroken wall of green.

Still came the monotonous chant of the leadsman.

"Mark five!"

"Quarter less five!"

"Deep four!"

On the bridge Chenoweth was pacing anxiously back and forth, his eyes turned constantly ahead. Occasionally he spoke to the helmsman.

"Port a bit."

"Easy."

"Steady as you go."

"Watch her; keep her steady."

The voice of the leadsman carried aft louder than before.

"And a half, three!"

He ran out on the wing of the bridge again. "Stand by the starboard anchor, Mr. Carlson."

Then as the ship lost all headway, "One shackle in the water. Let go!"

The anchor plunged overboard heavily, the clatter of the running chain disturbing the judicial deliberations of a row of solemn, brown pelicans, which rose from a near-by sandbar and flapped clumsily away.

As the first shackle entered the water, the chief mate set tight the compressor on the anchor chain, and the *Santissima Trinidad* lay silent and motionless on the water.

Presently a tall man in a resplendent cavalry uniform appeared on a sort of landing stage which had been built along the beach, and hailed in pure Castilian Spanish.

"What ship is that? Where from? Where bound?"

Captain Chenoweth leaned over the rail of the bridge and replied concisely, "*Santissima Trinidad*, former gunboat of the Dictator of San Lorenzo. Now held by the crew of the steamship *Gloria*, from New York with a cargo to the commander-in-chief of the White army!"

The cavalry officer stared for a moment in amazement, then raised one hand in a gesture of acknowledgment. "I will send a boat on board you."

A LITTLE later the same officer stepped out of a rude native cutter, pulled awkwardly by a half dozen men in white drill uniforms, and mounted the accommodation ladder which had just been lowered from the rail of the gunboat.

On deck he was met by the captain and chief engineer, the former wearing a strip of bloody signal bunting about his face and the severed handcuffs still on his wrists.

The latter was stripped to the waist, oil-smeared, and covered with scrapes and bruises.

The officer, somewhat tarnished as to gold lace but very ceremonious, swept them a low bow. "Have I the honor of addressing the commanding officer?"

"I am in command of the deck, señor," replied Chenoweth quietly. "My companion, Señor Johnson, commands the engine room. My name is Chenoweth."

The cavalryman bowed again. "Señores Chenoweth and Johnson"—he stumbled over the unfamiliar names—"I, too, have the honor to command. I am General Don Jaime de Morgante. My father is president of San Lorenzo."

The two seamen exchanged startled glances, recovered themselves and bowed in return. Don Jaime seemed to find nothing unusual in social amenities with such desperate looking characters.

"I have been expecting, señores," he stated gravely, "a cargo of arms to be delivered here by the *Gloria*, a vessel which is known to me. We could tell very little of what happened off shore just now. If the Captain will inform me at his pleasure?"

"Of course," agreed Chenoweth. "We have had this vessel only a little while, but doubtless in the wardroom we shall find refreshments and a place in which we can make clear our position. If the General will precede me?"

The conference in the wardroom lasted but a very few minutes. It was agreed that the *Gloria* should be recaptured before time was taken for further plans. Accordingly, Don Jaime took command of the gunboat, Chenoweth willingly retiring to the position of sailing master and Bill Johnson returning to the engine room.

In the course of the next twenty minutes the Blue prisoners from the lazaret were sent ashore under guard, four full gun crews and three officers brought on board from the White encampment in the forest, and the *Trinidad* worked clear of the inlet.

The lumbering *Gloria* was still in sight some twenty miles down the coast, and when the gunboat's turbines were given the full benefit of Johnson's skill, the distance between the ships decreased like magic. Hence the White gun crews were soon at their stations and the muzzle of the bow gun wavering uncertainly as the sights were laid across the bow of the freighter.

It seemed as though the Blues had kep man standing by at the halliards, for t echo of the warning shot had scarcely d away when the *Gloria's* flag fluttered do from the staff and her engines were stopp entirely. The sea had become much cal and under Don Jaime's orders the *Trini* drew close alongside, guns still trained deck and bridge, and took off the en crew, who dared not lift a rifle, as prisone All of them, forty or more, were stowed the most useful lazaret below decks.

Then, after consulting Chenoweth, D Jaime, who spoke almost perfect Engl sent the chief mate and Blake, the assista engineer, with seven or eight men on boa the *Gloria* to bring her back to the inl The speedy gunboat swung about on h course and soon left the freighter far aste

BACK in the anchorage once m and the prisoners safely asho Chenoweth, Bill Johnson, D Jaime and Colonel Valdez, one of the g nery officers, met again in the wardroo Though not large, the place was comfo able to the point of luxury. A heavy, ve handsome mahogany table occupied t center of the floor. Along the sides of t table and at each end were ranged eig deep, leather-cushioned chairs of the sa wood. A long buffet surmounted by a re tangular plate-glass mirror stood against t forward bulkhead, while the snowy lin which still covered the table, the flash glass and silverware from the buffet and t heavy green silk curtains at the windo formed an admirable setting for the wh uniforms of the officers but could only ma ludicrous the scarred and battered figu of the two seamen.

For all that, when he heard the details the taking of the *Santissima Trinidad*, D Jaime regarded them across the table wi eyes full of admiration, while the gunne officer could be heard muttering to hims a long string of wondering oaths.

"So now," concluded Chenoweth, w had told the story, "I suppose we can u load our cargo in peace and be on our wa back to New York."

Don Jaime's face clouded but he nodd thoughtfully. "Yes, señores, you may u load your cargo in peace and sail away a in peace, but for us there will be peace, p haps never. Tomorrow at sunrise m father will be shot in the courtyard of t castle of San Lorenzo. To my mother and sister no one knows what may come. In a few days, a week, whenever my strength is sufficient, I shall strike for revenge. Then if I am victorious, the sons and friends of my victims will strike in their turn for revenge and in the end, perhaps, San Lorenzo will vanish altogether beneath blood and ashes."

His face had grown darker as he talked and his eyes more somber, vindictiveness and profound sadness strangely equal in his voice.

Chenoweth spoke tensely. "The president is to be executed tomorrow, Don Jaime?"

"Yes, señor."

"Then why do you not move today to save him? A surprise attack, even with inferior force, might prove successful."

The officer shook his head. "I have less than a thousand men. In San Lorenzo are twelve hundred picked soldiers at the barracks on the outskirts of the city. These a desperate surprise attack might defeat, but there remains the great castle on the sea. It is garrisoned by four hundred men and is impregnable except to a large force with artillery. We have not a single gun."

Chenoweth leaned forward suddenly, his eyes gleaming. "Don Jaime, I have been into the port of San Lorenzo, in a merchant ship some years ago. I remember the castle well. Is it not like this?"

He found a pencil and sketched hurriedly on the snowy linen between them the narrow harbor of San Lorenzo and on the eastern point of land fronting the sea a rough figure representing the fortress. "The castle is directly on the water, toward the sea thick walls and many guns, heavy but old-fashioned. Toward the land thick walls, a few heavy guns, and many loopholes for machine-guns and rifles. But toward the harbor, lighter walls and only quick firers and machine-guns to beat off small boats.

"Is it not thus, Don Jaime?" The officer nodded, somewhat mystified by the other's excitement.

"It is as you say, Captain. The fortress was built three hundred years ago by the Spaniards. They feared most the English and the pirates, both of whom attacked from the sea. Therefore the strong walls and great guns face the sea. Also there was, and still is, a great iron chain which lies on the bottom of the narrow entrance to the harbor, one end on the opposite shore, one end rising into a chamber of the castle. When enemy ships appear, the chain can be hauled up by geared machinery and fastened with great shackles to the solid rock, making a strong barricade to the harbor. But no enemy ship has ever tested the strength of that chain. The guns bearing to seaward are too many. None but Indians and infrequently pirates attacked from land and they without artillery. Thus, as you say, the land side is but poorly defended and that of the harbor almost not at all."

CHENOWETH leaned forward, both hands gripping the edge of the table, his eyes fixed intently upon the general's face.

"Then why not attack from the harbor?" he demanded. "With artillery. The Blues do not know yet that their navy has changed hands. There is no wireless on the freighter and there was no time to send a message from this ship. At dusk, if we were to stand boldly in for the harbor with the Dictator's flag flying, the fort would not fire on us and the chain would not be hauled up. Once inside, the great surprise and our four guns which can be fired quickly, might reduce the fort in ten minutes."

As he listened, Don Jaime's lips had drawn back slightly, showing a narrow line of white teeth. Colonel Valdez's breathing had become plainly audible and his eyes lighted fiercely. Neither officer spoke.

"Now," went on Chenoweth with growing excitement, "a landing force must be sent in the instant the fort strikes its flag. Not a moment for them to recover from their surprise. Two hundred men under officers who know the vital points of the fortress would be sufficient. I myself can take this ship under the very walls, and, at the risk of bending a few plates, get the landing party ashore without boats.

"If at the same time the rest of your men surprised the Blue army barracks, I think we might hold the city by dark. Then there would be no executions at sunrise."

"Ah," murmured Colonel Valdez, "would there not?" But his voice was so low that no one heard him.

Don Jaime was on his feet. "So far as a man can see, the Captain's plan is inspiration. We have motor trucks and some horses. Eight hundred soldiers can be before the army barracks at dusk. The first shot from the harbor shall be their signal. They will be outnumbered but well armed and ready. For the castle, the Captain is also right. Two hundred men, correctly placed, magazine, armory and so on, could hold it well." He thought a moment, frowning. "I shall direct the fire upon the castle, and, if fortune favors us, lead the landing party. I know the ground perfectly. For the other, I shall need a man who can work desperately through the heat of the afternoon and at evening defeat an army half again as large as his own. Colonel Valdez, will you lead the attack upon the barracks?"

The colonel came stiffly to attention. "I will lead the attack, Don Jaime. If it fails, you will know that Valdez is dead."

"Then, señores," said the general quietly, "there is much to do between now and dusk. I shall not insult you by mentioning the danger." With an abrupt, jerky movement he removed his uniform cap and bowed his head. "May God be with our arms this day."

"Amen," muttered Colonel Valdez. The two seamen stood abashed and silent.

THE cruelly hot afternoon wore slowly away. The activity in the camp on shore was unceasing. The *Gloria*, under command of Mr. Carlson, reached the inlet and anchored a little inshore from the gunboat. Small boats made repeated trips from the beach to the freighter, coming out empty, returning laden to the gunwales with rifles, machine guns and ammunition. The humming of motor-truck engines sounded from time to time like giant bees in the forest, and at four o'clock, boat loads of soldiers began to come alongside the *Santissima Trinidad*. They were the gun crews and the picked men who were to form the landing party. The rays of the sun were now falling in a long slant, but retained the power of sledge hammers.

When Don Jaime returned on board, dark hollows had formed beneath his eyes and his white uniform was darkened with streaks and blotches of sweat. Still, his determination was undimmed and he informed Chenoweth with strained eagerness that he had seen the last of Colonel Valdez's regiment on their way to the mustering place in the jungle outside of town.

The camp of the White army was now quite deserted. The original crew of the gunboat, held at first on shore, had been transferred to the forward hold of the *Gloria*, as soon as it was empty of cargo, supplied with food and water and securely battened down. The two ventilators would keep the temperature of the place endurable, but were not large enough to encourage ideas of escape.

Another hour and the molten ball of the sun hung not far above the tops of the rugged mountains to the westward. The heat began to decrease markedly, and a gentle breeze, springing up from the sea, afforded great relief.

Two hundred soldiers, armed with rifles, bayonets and bandoleers, lay about idly under improvised awnings on the deck of the gunboat. They were a lean, swarthy, hard-bitten crew, some professional soldiers, a few foreign adventurers, but for the most part citizens of San Lorenzo, driven into the jungle by the cruelty of the dictator's rule. They played cards, smoked brown paper cigarets and smiled good-naturedly, but under it all was the strength and courage of Mexican jaguars. Observing them, Don Jaime nodded grimly.

About half the crew of the *Gloria*, including the chief mate and first assistant engineer, had been transferred to the *Santissima Trinidad*, for there was not one real sailor in all the White forces. The second mate and second assistant with a few men were left in charge of the freighter, which was to remain at anchor in the inlet. If the attack were successful, a messenger would be sent back that same night with orders to sail for San Lorenzo. If no messenger came, Chenoweth gave strict orders to the second mate to make for the nearest neutral port and lie there until he received word from the owners.

After this was arranged, the chugging of the gunboat's windlass sounded over the inlet, the anchor rose sleek and dripping into the hawsepipe, and with engines at half speed the *Trinidad* again felt her way out to sea. Once clear of the land, the throttle was opened wide and she hauled southeastward at a triumphant twenty-two knots an hour. The awnings on deck were struck and stowed away, while at sunset the soldiers were hidden below and everything made shipshape about the deck. The crews assigned to the four-inch guns were placed inside the deckhouse, ready to take their stations at a word, and arrangements were made for the speedy serving of shells.

Don Jaime himself took his place on the bridge, his white and gold uniform not dissimilar, with the exception of the spurs and puttees which would be hidden by the rail, from the naval uniform of the Blues. Chenoweth, too, had put on a suit of white from his room aboard the freighter. Bill Johnson's costume in the oven-like engine room below was unimportant and practically nonexistent.

Captain Chenoweth laid a course parallel with the coast, about a mile from shore, and as the gunboat tore through the water, an exquisite panorama, soft with the dim gold of sunset, unrolled before her. Now the beach would be wide and shelving, now dash into the sea in precipitous rocks, here the thatched roofs of native huts, there the mouth of a turbulent stream, and always the dark background of jungle. The sea was an endless sheet of turquoise.

AT LAST, as the *Trinidad* cleared a jutting headland, the white city of San Lorenzo lay spread before her. It was incredibly beautiful. Lights were beginning to twinkle among the houses; on one point of land at the entrance to the harbor a tall lighthouse blinked steadily, while on the other stood the fortress, its tawny walls pierced with many gun embrasures, retaining the last of the soft light of sunset.

Beyond the town the jungle lay silent and luxuriant as if unknown to man. Yet among its dense foliage eight hundred soldiers lay hidden, not stirring a leaf but ready at any instant to descend upon the barracks before them.

On the bridge of the gunboat, heading straight for the entrance to the harbor, Don Jaime and Captain Chenoweth stood like statues. The evening parade in the fortress was over, the flag had been hauled down at sunset and an incongruous air of tranquility lay over the massive walls. There were lights in the officers' quarters, and as the gunboat drew closer a plaintive song about mosquitoes together with the strumming of a guitar could be heard rising from a veranda.

Don Jaime and the captain remained silent. The wash of waves about the base of the fortress became plainly audible on the bridge and from a church tower in the city a bell began tolling softly. Then all at once a queer breath of warm air swept over the vessel and the fortress was right abeam. There had been no challenge or signal.

Don Jaime turned his head slightly. "Stop the engines, captain."

Chenoweth swung the handle of the engine-room telegraph deftly. The humming of the turbines below ceased and the vessel glided forward through profound silence.

"A little to the left, captain," said the general in a low, oddly abstracted voice. The sharp bow of the *Santissima Trinidad* swung toward the fortress very slowly, for way was almost off her.

"It is well." Don Jaime's voice suddenly cracked like a whip. "Now we shall see."

Whirling, he was down the ladder in a single leap. A staccato command rang out and the gun crews were pouring out of the deckhouse. Darkness had come on rapidly after the setting of the sun so that from the bridge Chenoweth could see only the dim whiteness of their uniforms. The long barrels of the four-inch guns on deck began to swing smoothly to port, then nosed up and down like a dog on a scent. Their crews huddled about the breeches, very active for a moment, then absolutely still.

Another sharp command and the whole deck sprang into lurid brilliance. The crash which followed was deafening, and the gunboat vibrated to the upper bridge. The explosion of the shells against the outer works of the fortress was also terrific and the clatter of falling bricks followed the first discharge. The range was point-blank and the *Trinidad's* guns thundered away so rapidly that one red flash seemed to touch off the next.

The alarm in the fortress was appalling. Every minute or two the dull rumble of collapsing masonry sounded above the bedlam of artillery, while in the frantic shrilling of bugles inside the casemates was nothing short of panic.

THE position of the gunboat was a tactical masterpiece. Not a single heavy gun could be brought to bear upon her, and shifting the clumsy, old-fashioned ordnance with panic-stricken crews under incessant bombardment was out of the question. The commandant of the fortress was a humane man. He surrendered after less than ten minutes of pummeling, a large white flag appearing specter-like above the walls.

The firing ceased at once and the gunboat swung inshore at slow speed. The soldiers hidden below poured up through hatches and scuttles, lining the rail expectantly, bayonets fixed and ready. In the sudden silence on deck, a fierce rattling of rifle and machine-gun fire from the direction of the Blue barracks on shore became audible for the first time. A great many typewriters operated simultaneously might have produced a similar sound. Chenoweth, himself handling the wheel of the *Trinidad*, found the distant uproar curiously unthrilling.

The sea-wall along the harbor side of the fortress was of solid masonry, quite narrow and at the present level of the tide about ten feet above the water. Coming about in a short arc, Chenoweth sent the gunboat directly alongside it, bending the rail amidships and scraping off yards of paint. Then, while the seamen were still searching for places to make fast their mooring lines, the landing force of two hundred desperate men tumbled over the damaged rail. Don Jaime himself led them, his sword flashing palely in the dusk and his voice ringing as though commanding a regiment. The White soldiers rushed back along the sea-wall, rounded a low, loop holed bastion and poured through the town gate into the fortress. The surprise was complete.

Meanwhile the firing from the army barracks was slackening rapidly. At last, with a bit of futile sputtering, it died away altogether and a deep-throated cheer rang over the city.

"*El presidente!*" The words seemed to echo from every street and housetop. "*El presidente! Viva! Viva! Viva! El presidente!*"

From the walls of the fortress rose an answering shout, of less volume but wild with triumph. "*Viva! Viva! Viva! El presidente!*"

After this, a queer, rustling silence fell over the capital of San Lorenzo, and Chenoweth came slowly down from the bridge.

"So this is a revolution," he muttered uncertainly to himself.

"Damned if she ain't," said a voice unexpectedly at his side. "And if you was to ask me, a pretty good one."

Bill Johnson, fresh from the engine room, as grimy and sweat-soaked as usual, was smoking a cigaret and courting pneumonia in the sea breeze at the rail.

"Things couldn't have gone better," agreed Chenoweth indifferently. "But you know, I can't help wondering if we did right to mess in here. Isn't it just one more chapter of the blood and ashes Don Jaime was talking about?"

"I don't know, Duke. It's out of our hands now."

They had been standing for some minutes in silence when from the interior of the fort rose another great cheer, in a different key, but full of amazed ecstasy. "*El presidente! Viva! Don Manuel! Viva! Viva! Viva!*"

"Seems to be Don Manuel's night," observed Bill dryly, when the tumult died away. "Wonder what's up now?"

"Can't tell. Didn't sound at all like our gang yelling."

A short time after this a single white-clad figure appeared at the end of the sea wall and strode out toward the gunboat, which was lying quietly at her moorings. Chenoweth and Johnson waited curiously until the newcomer came abreast of them and leaped down to the deck. Then they saw that it was Don Jaime.

"We have won," exclaimed the soldier in greeting. "The city is ours."

"I am satisfied," replied Chenoweth gravely.

Surprised by his lack of enthusiasm, Don Jaime regarded him keenly. "It is cause for rejoicing, señor."

"I don't know. Isn't it just part of the game? Won't there be more vengeance and plotting against you? Won't it keep on forever?"

Don Jaime laughed, with a soft note of pure happiness in his voice. "No, Captain, it will not keep on forever. Did you hear the cheering just now? My father came from his cell to talk to our prisoners. He has been close to death and sees clearly. The cheering occurred when the prisoners gave parole. They are free to return to their homes, their shops, their farms. They will work for San Lorenzo. As you said, Captain, there will be no executions tomorrow. I think it is a glorious day."

Bill Johnson scratched the back of his neck reflectively. "Well, Duke, accordin' to that, I reckon we done right, after all."

Chenoweth lifted his head. "I was wrong, Don Jaime. It is certainly a glorious day."

Soon after this the White officer returned to the fortress where he had much to do, but Captain Chenoweth, having slacked out the gunboat's mooring lines and rigged fenders over the side, found no other duty calling and retired to the extremely comfortable captain's cabin.

BILL JOHNSON and the other members of the ship's company found satisfactory quarters likewise, and soon, with the exception of one man in the engine room and two soldiers doing sentry go on deck, all on board were lost in a dreamless sea sleep.

The captain did not wake the following morning until a particularly deep-chested bugler cut loose from the wall of the castle perhaps fifty feet from the open port above his berth. By that time the sun had risen and the city of San Lorenzo was already beginning to stir. The inhabitants had had long experience in politcal upheavals, and, so long as there was no actual firing in the streets, were in the habit of going on doggedly about their business, hoping that the new government would be at least no worse than the old. For a capital city immediately after a revolution, San Lorenzo seemed remarkably peaceful.

One of the first things which Chenoweth saw after coming on deck was the chubby little *Gloria* lying at anchor in the middle of the harbor, the stream of water from her condenser splashing quietly overboard and a cloud of leisurely smoke rising from the galley smokestack.

An hour later, after breakfasting with the new garrison of the fortress, the captain and his men took boats and rowed out to the freighter, leaving the *Santissima Trinidad* with fires out, in custody of the White sentries. On board the *Gloria* they found everything in order. The prisoners had been put ashore and paroled during the night, and, with the exception of a hundred tons of cargo in the after hold, the ship was light and ready to begin her homeward passage.

Shortly after twelve o'clock, Chenoweth, acting upon orders from shore, moved her in to a pier at the head of the harbor to finish discharging cargo. Later in the afternoon there was a parade of the White army, including in a place of honor the entire crew of the *Gloria*. This parade ended in the central plaza before the steps of the capitol itself.

There Don Manuel made an impassioned speech promising a new birth of liberty and justice throughout the land, which was received with cheers not only by the soldiers but by the crowd beyond, many of whom already had reason to believe in the president's mercy.

In conclusion, Don Manuel paid glowing tribute to the crew of the *Gloria* and presented with his own hands a purse of gold to each officer and man. The captain and chief engineer, whose service had been more distinguished, also received the Grand Cross of San Lorenzo, the highest honor which could be conferred by the republic upon a civilian.

When it was all over, the crew departed at once for the busiest part of the city, determined to enjoy their popularity to the full and also to get rid of as much as possible of their newly acquired wealth. Chenoweth and Johnson, on the other hand, avoided the crowd and returned to the ship together, walking quietly through the narrow, high-balconied streets and not speaking during the whole journey. Once more on board, they found the holds empty and the hatches neatly battened down, this last a great tribute from any longshoremen.

"Well," said Chenoweth gruffly, "our job's done. We've put our cargo ashore where the owner wanted it. That lets a sailor out, I guess."

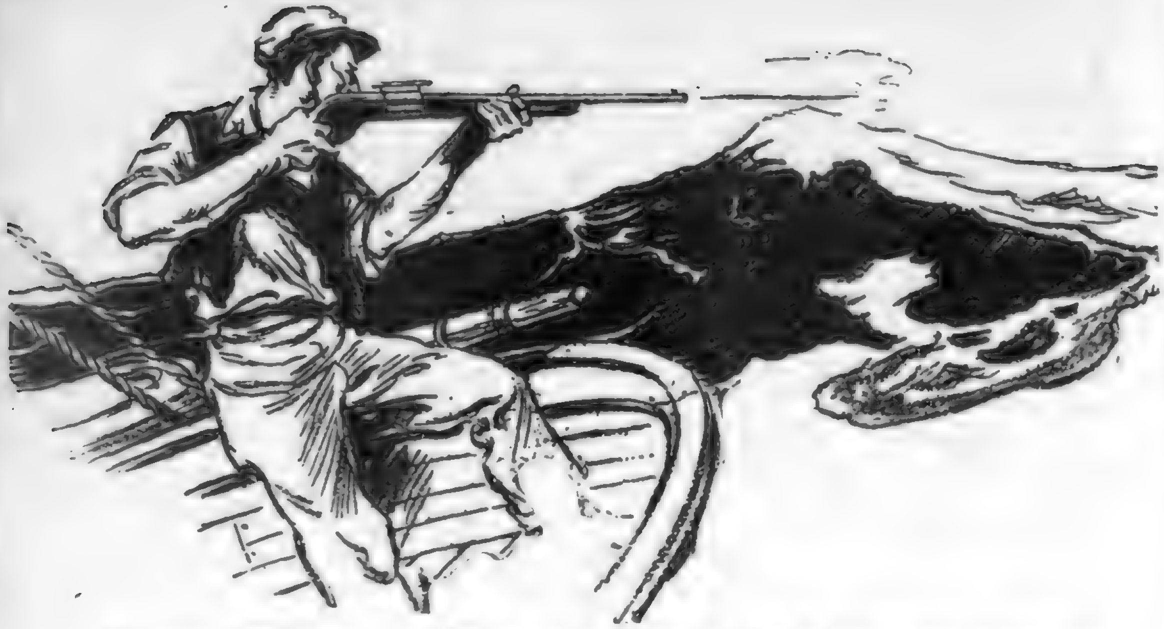
"Yep, fireworks seem to be about over. Wanta sail in th' mornin'?"

"Might as well, I guess. Articles carry us back to New York."

"Yep, that's so. Guess might as well."

They parted rather awkwardly.

The following day, while the air was still sharp with dawn, the little *Gloria* slipped out past the silent castle of San Lorenzo and headed northward through the open sea.



Part Three of BEATRICE GRIMSHAW'S *Romance of the* DARK ISLANDS *of the Pacific*

Preceding events briefly retold.

Philip Amory, war veteran and proprietor of a trading-post in Daru, Papua, returning from Cairns on a B. P. boat, rescued Jinny Treacher, a chorus girl, from sharks. This deed won him Jinny's heart and also the affection of Pia Laurier, a fellow passenger and the daughter of wealthy Australians.

Amory became madly in love with Pia, but realized he was in no social or financial position to press his suit. Furthermore he learned from the ship gossip that Pia is engaged to a Sir Richard Fanshawe. On leaving the ship at Thursday Island, Amory meets Fanshawe who is coming on board.

The name Fanshawe means little to Amory, but the glimpse he got of him made him feel sure he had seen the man before. He could not get this thought out of his mind during the next few weeks at Daru.

On an evening when two of the Assistant Resident Magistrates were in Bassett, the Resident Magistrate invited Amory, called Black Sheep in Daru, "mostly because his eyes are black, and his hair, and partly because he is a decent sort of chap," to dinner. Besides the expected guests an Englishman named Spicer was present, a pompous ass and the forerunner of another so-called expedition going from Papua to the other side. Spicer explained he was to organize the party while awaiting his chief, Sir Richard Fanshawe. At the mention of Fanshawe's name from another's lips, Amory's memory gets a jolt—he remembers with horror when and where he saw Fanshawe before.

A night several years previous his boat was driven ashore on an island then unknown to him. He found it to be Iota, the leper colony. That night he saw Fanshawe make his escape from this island.

Thus Amory is nearly mad, knowing Pia Laurier intends to marry Fanshawe, the leper. He bolts from Bassett's house, but finally returns after the others have left, to acquaint Bassett with these strange facts. Bassett tells him his only course is to notify Pia's parents.

To do this Amory goes across to Thursday Island where he cables Pia's father to delay the marriage. While there he meets Jinny Treacher again who informs him that Fanshawe has arrived and knows his secret of the gold out back, and plans to beat him to it. At this news, Amory makes hurried preparations to start out back himself, to win the race for gold.

CHAPTER VI

THAT which comes next must be told; but I shall not linger upon it.

I made Port Moresby on the evening of the third day. My boy was not with me; I had sent him back to Daru direct, and was alone. It was duskish when I sighted Paga Hill, with a nasty squall coming up. I was beaten out by the long solitary trip, so soon after leaving hospital; I thought with disgust of the trouble of seeing the doctor, and the customs, and getting pratique, all to be gone through before I could have leave to land. Very likely they wouldn't give me pratique

Black Sheep's GOLD

that evening; I should have to sleep on board the tiny cutter again, just when I needed a good rest.

The sight of Fisherman Island looming up to starboard decided me; I would run in there, spend the night at the empty quarantine station, and get off early next day for the port. Nobody would know—the island was uninhabited save by the old, crazy Solomon Island caretaker who had been there for over thirty years, and couldn't tell tales even if he would. Perhaps I was breaking quarantine laws—I didn't know, and did not much care. I knew that the two houses were comfortable, if one could get into them, and I reckoned I could manage that.

The wind was poor, dropping toward sunset; it took me a good while to run right up, and I had to land in half-dark. I found the two little houses, standing up stark and pale against the velvet sky; I scrambled into one, and cautiously flashed my torch.

"Well!" was my astonished comment.

I had remembered the place as very bare—a rude table, a bench or two, nothing more. The houses had never yet been used for isolation purposes; picnic parties were allowed to go out there and stop the night; honeymoon couples, escaping from the too-persistent interest of the townspeople, camped sometimes; so did fishing expeditions—always with permission. I had none, but I did not intend to let that trouble me. It was eight miles from Port, and I could slip off at dawn without any one being the wiser.

Somebody had certainly been preparing the place for a stay. There was a comfortable bed, a couple of planter chairs, a box that—I guessed—contained linen and oddments of various kinds. I peered into the cookhouse. Stores; cooking utensils. "They'll be coming along tomorrow," I thought; and reflected that I was luckier than I deserved.

IT WAS very cool, I remember; far cooler than it would have been in little iron rooms beneath the stifling roofs of town. I had a bite of something from the locker of my boat, flung my bedding on the unknown person's bedstead, and slept magnificently. Once I woke, to hear the sea grumbling on the coral reef outside, and catch the sudden rattle of a squall. Sleepily I thought that I was lucky to be where I was; and so dozed off again.

Dawn came with a wild crying of sea-birds, and a sudden wind that burst in the door. It waked me, and I slid to earth, looking for my shoes, for now it was full time I got away. I suppose I took a few seconds to slip on and tie the shoes; I never heard a sound—but when I looked up, there was some one in the doorway.

My first thought—for you could not see the man's face, so blackly was he silhouetted against the pale rose and primrose of the sky—was—"Caught; maybe it's the doctor inspecting." My second sent the blood from heart to finger-tips, like leaping flame. I knew that tall, tight, well-set figure, that bearded head. I had seen it four times; once on the island of decay and death; once on the great liner in the Arafura Sea, once at the hotel on Thursday, and now here.

"Jinny lied," I thought, furiously. "She told me he was at the Daru end, recruiting. She did not want me to see him—to come to Port Moresby. . . . Why?"

There was no time to work that out. Fanshawe had seen me, he came across the floor in a couple of strides, and asked me, with profane additions, what on earth I might be doing there.

I could hardly answer him at first; never, till that moment, had it occurred to me that, however well he was known to me, I was, so far, quite unknown to him, except by repute. He might have seen me on the island, on the boat, at Thursday, but evidently he had not. On Iota, I was in the dark and he in the light; on the steamer, I was one of a crowd, and he the most distinguished person in it; in the Thursday hotel, I had just caught a glimpse of him, lying with his eyes shut. He did not know me.

I had little doubt that he knew of me, and I did not care to extend his knowledge—at all events, not before I had had time to find out what he, for his part, was doing in Port Moresby. I answered him briefly.

"I did not know any one had the place. I got in late, and camped."

"The —— you did," answered Fanshawe roughly. "Don't you know you have to get leave to land?"

"There was a squall coming."

"Squall be hanged. You'd better clear out of this, and be thankful if I don't report you." He stood there, waiting for me to go; big, masterful, steady, the very embodiment of power—power of position, of character, of money. In that minute, I began to understand—albeit dimly and reluctantly—why Pia Laurier had been willing to cast in her lot with him. It was the daring, race-riding, surf-shooting strain in her, typical young Georgian as she was, that had drawn her toward this successful soldier and speculator, Sir Richard Fanshawe.

I might have gone—knowing myself to be in the wrong, and not wishing to enlighten Fanshawe more than was necessary about myself—I might have gone, and changed the course of four lives that day—had not the merest trifle intervened. Nothing on earth but a cushion. Sir Richard had been carrying it, wrapped up in paper; while he was talking to me, he laid it down on a table, and the paper, being insufficiently fastened, burst open. I saw the thing, a pretty trifle of white satin and embroidered flowers, crying "Wedding Present" in every stitch and thread. I saw somebody's card fastened to it. And immediately I knew what it was; for whom it had been intended. And the world, for one reeling instant, vanished behind veils of red.

I came out of that moment's madness calm and cold, as once or twice, in the war, I had found myself, before the doing of some deed that brought a medal after it. Never, in those days, had I needed my nerve more than it was needed now.

"You are Sir Richard Fanshawe," I stated. He looked at me curiously; I thought he was beginning to guess.

"It may interest you to know," I went on, "that I am Philip Amory."

Now he turned scarlet; the curious, honey-colored eyes flashed crescent moons of white above and below, like the eyes of a dangerous horse; and—like a horse again—his ears actually moved, as though he would have laid them back. There are men who have this power of moving the ears; it may be my luck that I have never yet seen it in any that one could trust.

"It seems," he said, restraining himself, "that I owe you a great deal of kindly interest in what I had supposed were my affairs."

I let the gibe pass. I let other things pass. The recent adventurings of Jinny offered a very large and very black crow to pick with a coming bridegroom, had I been so inclined. I was not. I had one thing only in my mind, and like a charging bull, I drove straight for it.

"Where is Miss Laurier?" I asked. I didn't expect him to answer, but he replied at once, coolly.

"About forty-five miles out at sea, on today's *Morinda*."

"She has come back to marry you?"

"Exactly."

"You're fixing up this place for her?"

He did not reply to that; he looked at me, watchfully, as one boxer eyes another in the ring.

"Well, I want to tell you," I said, "that you won't marry her — as long as I'm above ground."

HE WAS silent; not from embarrassment—I doubt if any circumstance on earth could have embarrassed Richard Fanshawe—but because he chose to throw the weight of the moment upon me. Silence is a fine weapon, and a difficulty; Fanshawe knew how to use it.

Again I charged like a bull; but this time, it was as a bull charges, frantically and uselessly, upon the barrier about the ring.

"You were the man who got away from Iota Island. You're an escaped leper."

He just laughed a little; seemed to be waiting for me to have done. I had not anticipated this. I had all my arguments and answers ready; in my mind, the interview was to have run somewhat as follows—

. . . *"But I never ought to have been there at all; it was a put-up job."*

"I don't care. I don't believe you anyhow; but if I did, you were months in that hell before you got away."

"You've no proof. I can simply deny it."

"I have enough, even without that damaged finger of yours. I'll hound you round the world; I'll go back to Omega and wake up the Government there. I'll make your life unlivable, unless you promise."

Nothing of all this had been said. He was just standing there, not admitting, not denying. If I was strong, he, with his weight of added years and honors, his money and his celebrity to back him up, was stronger. I could feel all that—as he meant that I should feel it—almost visibly upholding and supporting him, as we stood there in the windy quarantine house, with the seabirds crying on the sands outside; Fanshawe and I—"one and one, with a shadowy third"—on the eternal triangle yet again.

It was my turn to be silent now. I was by no means done, but I did not, for the moment, see my way. "I'd give my life," I kept thinking, disconnectedly and fiercely. "I'd give my life!" But how could one give it? There was nothing to tell me—yet.

Fanshawe was entirely self-possessed. He did not light the typical cigaret of the villain—possibly because he had none with him, possibly because his even, steady nerves required no such aid. He just waited till it seemed clear that I had done, and then spoke.

"Your boat is outside. You can get away as quick as you like."

"If I do," I warned him, "I'll sail straight to Port and stop your damned marriage."

"Just as you choose," he said. He took the white cushion out of its paper, smoothed it, laid it carefully on the back of one of the planter chairs; set down some small parcels he had in his pockets, and walked out of the house. He did not seem to be paying any attention at all to me.

FOR the first time in a pretty adventurous life, I felt out of my depth. I could not follow this man's thought. I could not make anything of him. What was coming next. I could not even imagine. Like a rising flood, like one of the nameless, terrifying forces felt in dreams, the cold strength of his character seemed to envelop me, and weigh me down.

One used to fight in the Great War, sometimes, when one was almost three parts asleep; drunk with the want of rest, long continued, with the never-relaxing strain. So I fought then, drunk, drugged by Fanshawe's enormous personality, his superior mental forces, yet determined, as ever one had been in the trenches, not to give in while life was life, and I was I.

We went down to the beach almost together. There was my cutter, rocking on the tide; there, long and black and slim, was what I knew to be the fastest thing afloat for a thousand miles—a speed launch capable of doing thirty miles an hour, which had lain for some good while in Port, unsaleable, because she simply ate fuel. I thought I knew who had bought her, now; who didn't count a tin or two of benzine, when he happened to be in a hurry.

"It doesn't matter," I thought. "Eight miles is only eight miles, and I'll be there not much behind him." I picked up my little dinghy, slung it into the light-green water, and pulled out. I was getting up anchor, when it occurred to me to look and see what Fanshawe might be about. What I saw puzzled me. He had got his engine going, but not thrown in the clutch. The launch was shaking from stem to stern with the fierce throbbings of her iron heart; her cable was stowed, and she was drifting a little with the tide, but no start had been made.

There seemed only one thing to do. The wind was freshening, the sun half-way above the sea. Every thin palm-tree of the hundreds dotted about the sandy barrenness of Fisherman Island was clapping hands to the rising breeze. I hoisted sail, and got under way.

When the wind had laid hands on jib and mainsail, and we were running fairly, I gave the sheet a turn round its cleat, and looked back. There was a great space of water, bright green inshore, bright blue outside, between myself and Sir Richard Fanshawe. But the launch, now under way, was beginning to eat up that space as it was said she ate up fuel. She lifted her bow clean out of water, threw walls of spume to right and left of her, and, at the apex of a long inverted V of wake, tore landward.

"Put on as much speed as you like," I thought, watching her. "I'll do it—with this wind—in forty minutes, and that's good enough." Nevertheless I could not feel quite easy; it seemed to me that Fanshawe was just the sort of man to keep a card up his sleeve.

"What card could he have?" I argued with myself, as the cutter heeled over, and foam began to gabble along her sides. "I can say enough—and I will—to put a dozen weddings off; and once put off—once let me have time—"

I stopped, seized the tiller, and snatched the boat over.

"Gosh," I said to myself, "is that your card, my man?" For he had turned the launch, and was heading her—thirty miles an hour—straight for me.

All I had heard of Sir Richard's daring as an airman, in the war, went racing through my head. His fierce attack—his famous stunts. Truly he was stunting now. He might, probably would, cut my boat in two, and spill me in a shark-haunted sea, seven and a half miles from the mainland. He might merely wreck himself in the attempt. Anyhow, he meant to try. That was Fanshawe. And, I swear, even as I saw him drive right down on me, I found time, somehow, to think "God, Richard Fanshawe, if you weren't the biggest villain unhung, what friends we two could have been!"

In the same moment, I had reached for the sporting rifle that lay loaded in its clip beside the deckhouse, flung it to my shoulder, and shot him dead.

He fell from the wheel of the launch, right down into black-blue water, sank and was gone.

THE launch, released from control, went ahead furiously. I stayed watching it; wondering whether it would get to the mainland without hitting anything, and what would be thought of its arrival, empty. I had little thought of mysef, though I was vaguely aware that my own life might some day be forfeit, to pay for the life I had that minute spilled into the Pacific Ocean. It did not seem to matter very much. Nothing seemed to matter. I was conscious of a stupid coolness, a sensation as if the world and everything in it was done, gone—and I left floating, unreal, half-alive, in a universe of shades.

In this mood, I 'bouted ship, and sailed back toward Fisherman. It was yet very early; the sun was up, but shadows were still violet, and lights raw gold. I can not say how lovely, how solitary it was, out there miles from the mainland, with the gulls and sand-pipes running on the beaches, and the thin palm-trees fluttering fathom-long fingers against a pale, innocent sky. I looked at it all as one looks through a window, from outside. I had been one with this, and was not, any longer. For now I understood that killing during the red years of war had not been the same as this killing; now I felt myself, for the first time in my days, blood guilty.

The man had tried to run me down. Yes—but I had not even attempted to escape, to maneuver out of his way. I had shot him; not because he was trying to ram my cutter, but because he was on his way to marry Pia Laurier.

With that thought came strange relief; the chill stupidity cleared away from my brain. Had I not said I would give my life for her? Had I not done it, potentially?

If any one ever came to know of the business of this morning I should hang, as sure as God made little apples. Good. Well and good. That seemed to wipe out the stain. I can not explain; I can only say how I felt about it. I can only tell you that I steered the cutter, with a light enough heart, toward the back of the island, took a great sweep out to sea, and made for Port again by a round that, I calculated, would bring me into town toward afternoon.

When I came in, hoisting the yellow flag that asks for the doctor and pratique, I was left to wait some time. At last the doctor's launch came out and freed me; the customs let me go, with an easy question or two.

"Jove, Amory, you've hopped into the middle of something," declared the official. "Port is humming out loud like a hive of bees. Sir Richard Fanshawe blew in here the other day, borrowed Fisherman from—"

Long light was falling on the kingfisher-colored waters of the bay, when I at last sailed in among the anchored schooners, ketches, launches, whaleboats, and ran up my yellow flag. The clumsy bulk of the *Morinda* lay crouched, like a whale, beside the wharf. Brown, furry-headed boys were running trucks about, with savage cries; winches were clattering. Hours ago the passengers must have disembarked, met their eager friends, and gone away home. Where was Richard Fanshawe's bride? What home had given her refuge, who was to have gone this day with that dead man, on her honeymoon journey?

The question was answered soon, and with it any dozen others that I might have wished to put. Scarcely had I passed customs and doctors and landed, before half my acquaintance—it seemed—were about me, vying with one another for first chance to relate the event of the day. I must have been a godsend to them; every one else in town had, no doubt, discussed the affair.

SIR RICHARD FANSHAWE had arrived by a local boat some days before. He had hired Brackenridge's well-known speed launch, and kept running back and forward to Fisherman Island, fitting up one of the quarantine houses with "every luxury you could imagine," in preparation for the wedding that was to take place before he and his party set off for the unknown. Sir Richard's bride was a countess in her own right, also an heiress and a beauty; she had run away from her people to marry him, and they were madly in love with each other

Sir Richard Fanshawe had taken out the launch early that morning, and had never come back, and the launch had been sighted actually coming in from Fisherman on its own, till it ran aground on a shoal. When they got to it, there wasn't a soul on board, and no trace of the bridegroom but his gold cigar-case. The propeller was damaged and wobbly; that might have occurred either before or after the accident. Probably before—if so, you could see what had happened—Sir Richard hanging over the stern to watch the running of the propeller; hanging a bit too far, and—whiff!

On the whole every one seemed to think it had been "Whiff." Fisherman and the surrounding sea had been fruitlessly searched, but the bridegroom had utterly vanished, and it had been necessary to call in the Anglican parson, that accredited ambassador of evil, to meet the unlucky bride and break the news.

Everybody told me all this, all together, with the chastened enjoyment that marks the relation of a real tragedy, none of your famines and floods and railway accidents in Siberia or Bengal, but something flavory and exciting, happening close at hand. In the midst of the clamor, I gathered my goods and escaped, thankful to have passed the barrier that I had unconsciously feared—the question I had been awaiting, with anxiety untold— "Did you see anything, hear anything, of an accident?"

I couldn't have convinced any one, with a denial of the facts I should have had to deny. But they had deceived themselves; assumed, without question, in their eagerness to tell me all about it, that I could have nothing, on my part, to tell. I was much mistaken, if they wouldn't be repeating to each other, by and by, the very denials I had not made. . . . "There's Amory; he came along a few hours after, and never saw a thing." . . . "Amory swears there wasn't a trace of him anywhere."

If I had doubted my safety, I did not doubt it now. From the wharf and the steamer, and the buzzing crowd of friends, enemies, acquaintances gathered thereabout, I turned away. The evening light was orange on the red streets of Port

Moresby, the dragonfly-tinted sea darkening to indigo, as I climbed up the long, steep, stony path that led to the house where Pia might be found.

Wilderness folk live much on omens, cherish symbols, perhaps inordinately. The path was an emblem to me; insomuch that I wondered anxiously if Pia would be there when I arrived, at the top of that long, hard climb. If she were out, gone, the omen would be bad.

SHE was not out. The native in a Government tunic, who came to the steps, answered my inquiry with "Sinuabada she stop."

Would she see me? I scribbled my name on an envelop, and sent it in.

She would see me. The boy came back to say that "Sinuabada she talk you come."

It seemed too easy, too simple. I felt almost afraid. These months of dreaming—days and nights of barren desire, homesickness for the sound of her voice, the sight of her black little head—and beneath it all the echo, never resting, never ending, of all the seas, physical, social, spiritual, that flowed forever between us—were these things nothing, after all? Had I dreamed in truth? Had time flowed backward, and set me where I was on that blue-sea morning when Pia Laurier stooped like Dian to Endymion, and showed me love in maiden eyes?

No. This was Pia, slowly coming through the curtains at the end of the veranda and it was not the Pia of my dream.

Graver, older, changed, I saw her. I saw too, that the change was not—as it well might have been—the work of the last few hours. Whatever had altered her was less recent than the tragic end of her bridegroom. She had, indeed, the look of one who has been half-stunned by an unexpected blow, and scarcely yet recovered; but the grief, the wild despair of love parted from love in fulfillment's very hour—these were not her's.

There was no one on the veranda—I think, for the moment, no one in the house—save us two only. A long way below, the red-roofed town was darkening to night; in the dusk harbor, riding lights of ships winked one by one. Here, high on Paga Hill, day lingered yet; the rosy fingers of the bauhinia flowers trembled against the last rose of the sky; the stars of frangipanni showed, still pale, among the new pale stars of heaven. . . . . So I met her, found her again, my rose, my star.

I had almost feared the meeting, been afraid of what I might feel in her presence; might, terribly, with shut lips, remember. I thought my love might have been clouded by the shadow of the day, as hers might have been dimmed by time.

I was to learn here, for the first time and the last—since it was for all time after—what love could mean, and do. There was not, between us, the bar of any difference, distrust; the chill of any "variation or shadow of change." In the flower-scented semi-dusk we met, she who should, that day, have been the bride of another man, I who had that man's blood upon my hands, and it was as if the long months since we parted on the great liner, at Goode Island, had been a minute only, and as if nothing, no one, had ever come between.

Nothing of all the explanations, all the talk, that should have been between us two, got itself said. For one moment we stood, filling our hungry eyes with one another, and I think I was, in that moment, as pale as she. Then our arms were round each other, and the honey of the sweetest kiss in all the world was on my lips at last.

She was sitting on my knee by and by—I don't know where I had found a chair—and it was a bit later, and the stars were suddenly very bright among the swaying leaves of the bauhinias. And now we began to talk, but it was not the talk I had figured.

"What are you going to do till we are married?" was the first thing I remember asking her.

And she—"Oh, go home and make it up with Dad and Mother, I suppose."

I did not ask her what she had to make up. I was too busy swallowing a large lump of disappointment. Somehow I had thought—but that of course was impossible!—a girl with money (curse her money!) and I without even enough cash to buy stores for my trip.

Well, if anything on earth was sure, it was sure that I should have enough to pay for everything I fancied, when I came back from that trip.

THE more reason—if reason were wanted—for getting away at once. For leaving her. I had another flash of insight just then; I saw ahead, and knew that love and pain were never long apart; sensed, as a sea-gull senses coming storm, the suffering I was to know through her.

She went on talking. She sat there on my knee as if it had been a chair, her arms supporting her, round my neck; and yet I felt that, for the moment, she had withdrawn herself a little.

"You see, they thought—at least Mother did; Dad wasn't there—that there was too much hurry about—" and now she faltered; her face turned, in the dusk, a little away from me—"about the marriage."

I did not answer.

"Richard cabled," she went on, clearing her voice a little, and beginning to play, unconsciously (but I was not unconscious of it) with the ends of my tie. "He said he was starting earlier than he had expected, on his exploring trip through the unknown part of Papua. And he said one never knew one would come back. And he asked me to meet him here and marry him before he left."

I was still silent. Best to let her tell in her own way—but I knew it all beforehand.

"I telegraphed," she went on. "I said yes." She paused again. A mopoke, early awake, was beginning his nightly wail among the eucalyptus trees outside. "Hoo, hoo," he mourned. "Hoo, hoo, hoo!"

. . . "Mother didn't like it. She said he could put off his trip, come up to Singapore—we were staying at Government House—and do the thing decently. She almost forbid me to leave. But—well, mother's pretty clever; she knows when to stop. She said at last that if I was bent on marrying some one, it was better Richard than—than—"

"I know."

"So she let me go. She couldn't come herself; my sister Anne had joined us, and mother thought His Excellency was rather taken—he's a widower, you know. And that made her determined to stop, if the heavens fell. . . . She's a very, very good mother, you know, quite the best sort they make, and I love her frightfully, but she DOES— Well!— So I came. And I—I— Let me go."

I did not struggle to hold her, by so much as a finger or a fold of her dress. I knew that, for the moment, something other than love, or I, had her in its grip. Death. The thought of today; of the man who was to have held her in his arms; lying "tossed with tangle and with shells" at the bottom of the Coral Sea.

She stood by the veranda rails; I could just see her in the darkness, and hear, faintly, the sound of her subdued weeping. I was not jealous of those tears. I understood.

She came back as I had known she would, in a minute or two, and, shielded by the darkness, let me wipe the tears from her face.

"THERE, sweetheart," I found myself saying, as one consoles a crying child, when its fit of tears is past. "Don't mind about him. He wasn't worth—"

"It's not that. It's because I'm not sorry—not really sorry. Almost glad. I never should have done it. I was mad to promise. But you—you—"

As clearly as if she had spoken them, I heard the words, "You left me."

"There was something," she said presently, taking my handkerchief out of my pocket, and using it to wipe her eyes, and (I can't help it) blow her darling nose—"There was something I didn't quite grasp about it all. I was in a hurry to get away from everything—and I thought—forgive me, will you? I should love to see you at my wedding, and walk past you, and look up at him, as if you didn't exist. I didn't do much thinking. But I couldn't help feeling at times, as if some one had set me a sum to work, and I could work it—all but one figure. I hadn't that figure. I don't think I have it yet—but I don't care. If ever you know any more about the whole thing—Richard's trip, and the hurry he was in, and whatever else I mayn't have heard—I know you'll tell me."

"If ever I know anything more than I do know about it," I told her, "I will certainly tell you." And to myself I added. "God forbid your knowing half what I do, now or ever."

CHAPTER VII

FROM where I was camped, the whole world seemed to fall away in one huge wave, upon whose crest the boys and I precariously hung. Four days we had toiled to reach this place, four days of hardest work, cutting our road foot by foot through forest that was knitted and tangled together, first by the thorny "bush rope" that is the curse of much New Guinea travel, later by something that was even worse—trailing bamboo. We had gone soaked with heat night and day, the brown bodies of the carriers streaming, my own light singlet sticking to my back. We were pitted with leech bites, scarred by mosquitoes, and as we sat in camp, every man kept scratching almost ceaselessly at the painful lumps raised by that insect pest, scrub itch.

A grid of sticks beneath a single thickness of calico represented my bed and my shelter; I hadn't had enough dinner, and wasn't likely to, for months; comfort was a dream, and danger daily food.

And I was happy. Not in the excited, romantic fashion of the new chum let loose for the first time in the bush; rather, in the way of one who has long thirsted for a draft of the home airs about his native town, and, after long travel, long difficulty, has won back to it at last. I wish I could find words to tell the completeness of that conviction; the certainty—based on no producible facts—that I was in my proper place and doing what I ought to do—here, four days inland from the mid-waters of the Romilly River, away from all the world, white men and all their works; here, on the spine of the Dreadnaught Ranges verging—at last, at last!—on the unknown.

From today, I knew, the worst of the work began; I sat, after supper, looking down the sweep of the forest wave, and counting what had been done, since I and my carriers left the coast, ten days before, and began creeping up the little known Romilly in canoes. The sun had but just disappeared; still, on the sea of forest, yellow lights lingered, those strange sunset lights, shading into orange and indescribable rare emerald, that the Papuan traveler knows; still, one could catch the blue-green glimmer of the Romilly, looking up now and then like an eye through the parted trees. Savoring the short and meager smoke that was all I could allow myself, I scanned the world below, and decided that I had done well.

Grace, the dead miner, hadn't left the Romilly till he came right to the head of the navigable part. I, acting on what was more a guess than a conviction, had branched off from the river half way up. Nobody knew just what lay a day or two beyond my present camp, but from what I could see and infer, I thought I might succeed in cutting off weeks of work, by going on just as I was going, and—probably—avoiding the terrible stretch of limestone country that had been the undoing of Grace and his party. Limestone is the terror of explorers in western Papua; it means caves, holes, traps, pinnacles, razor edges, it means water that has all run away underground, and tracks indiscoverable by the eyes of any white; it is, in fine, a curse. I thought I had lifted the curse, for this trip anyhow. I might go a longer way round than Grace had gone, but I was likely to get there sooner.

This heartened me, for I knew that with tomorrow, we—I and my twenty carriers—would strike something sterner even than the slow cutting and crashing and struggling that had been our lot for four days. Tomorrow, the real climb began; the very pinch of the night wind, blowing suddenly cold upon us, down from the tops of God-knows-where, told one that; the clearness and sparkle of the stars, the carpet of moss, inches thick, covering trees and fallen logs; the red-blossomed begonias, the raspberries, large and sweet, that trailed about the edges of the bush—all signs of increasing altitude. I looked at my barometer last; its unimpassioned statements in blacks and whites interested me less than the tongues of forest and of sky.

So, with the smell of cut leaves and fallen wood about me—and I know no sweeter perfume on earth—in the opening made by a gigantic trunk that falling, had crashed its way through the forest, and cleared a camping space—I sat, and smoked, and felt myself at peace. And the sun went down upon my day.

I SHOULD have slept well that night. I did not. "Sleep," I told myself. "You must sleep. Tomorrow's a hard day." But there seemed to be springs in my eyelids, holding them up; the muscles of my limbs were stiff and unrelaxed. I could not sleep. By the dying flicker of the fire I could see the carriers lying beneath their tent-flies, each man shrouded in his gray blanket, still as the sheeted corpse that he resembled. The very sight and sound of them, snoring there, made me feel less sleepy than ever.

Toward morning, when I should have been waking, I dropped into confused, tired sleep. The first spears of sunrise woke me like a stab; it is not at sunrise, but before, that the explorer should leave his none-too-downy bed. With a curse at my own laziness, I swung my feet over the end of the stick platform, pulled on boots, and was dressed. The air of sunrise was like a draft of iced wine; far below the crest of our camp blue hummocks of mountain flung themselves out of rolling seas of pearl-colored mist; tree-silhouettes against the light of dawn showed like dark seaweeds, afloat in golden water. Already the carriers had their fire going; they sat round it, blanket-robed, watching the pot of rice cook over the flames. I looked at them, almost through them; felt, as one feels in such places, that they, the brown men of the country, made scarce a break in the glorious, the intoxicating sense of solitude that a white man knows, on the verge of untrodden lands. Again, the passion of the unknown possessed me. Again I felt, as I had felt before, that no treasure obtainable from such a journey could match, for a moment, with the treasure of the journey itself. Over that nearest ridge, a couple of days' march on, there was no man knew what; but when I topped the mountain, I should know. And I said, in my rashness—"This is good; I ask no more of life."

In the same moment, I turned, looked carelessly down the long cutting in the forest that we had made the day before, and saw a figure seated on a log.

The current of my blood seemed to stop, as the flow of the Romilly River stops, for an instant, when the Gulf bore comes sweeping in, and holds it back. Then, as the bore flies up the river, driving all before it, anger, and sick dismay, invaded my soul. There was something else too—gratified vanity, and a kind of angry love, perhaps, but they were drowned beneath the uprushing tide. I took ten steps to the place where Jinny Treacher was sitting, and I said to her, "God, Jinny, what made you do this?"

SHE looked up at me. I could see now how her beauty was wrecked; how her eyes had sunk back into her head, and her copper hair lost its shine; how she had worn herself to a skeleton, and let her clothes fall into rags. There were sores on her arms and neck—leech-bite sores, blue marks of mosquito bites, deep scratches made by lawyer thorn. Her shoes were bandaged onto her feet. Her hat was a tangle of torn straw. Never did dainty girl look less dainty, merry soul less gay than "Gin-Sling," sitting there at dawn in the midst of the Papuan forest.

Anger had possession of me, and yet—though I knew that she had practically wrecked my expedition—I could not choose but pity the bright thing, brittle as a butterfly, who had wagered her light self against the terrific powers of the unknown; who, before the threshold well was crossed, lay beaten. Nothing but the slow pace enforced on me by the cutting of a track had kept her with me so far. She must have known this; guessed that her only chance of life was to come forward and show herself, fling herself on my mercy, before it was too late. She had obtained a canoe (as I afterward learned) from the village at the Romilly mouth, and persuaded a small crew to accompany her. Living and sleeping on board, making the most of the small stock of provisions she had brought up the coast from Daru, she was able to keep her boys with her until she landed at the place where I had debarked a few hours earlier.

There they deserted, as carriers will, and she had had no food save what she could carry herself, no shelter save the forest, during the four days of my journey toward Dreadnaught Range. Luckily for her, it was impossible to lose the way, even when she fell behind, since the track we were cutting made our course plain as a macadamized road. I think she went in constant terror; terror of natives, terror of wild beasts (not knowing that there was nothing to fear in that direction, save a pig or two), terror, well justified, of dangerous snakes, and at last—I fear—even terror of me; for she must have guessed, all too soon, that her plan of following me right through was madness, and that she would be forced into showing herself.

But I do not think she knew, even suspected, that her coming stamped the expedition into dust. She had heard accounts of exploration in other countries; believed, no doubt, a good many "travelers' tales" that were half fiction, formed her ideas largely from the typical "explorer" of that stage world that was, after all, her proper medium, the glass through which she viewed all things of life. Through the midst of these pleasing falsities, these spun-sugar delusions, the reality of outback Papua had crashed like a charging wild boar; Jinny, for the first time in her life, was outmatched, beggared, crushed, thrown. And even then, she did not understand.

She thought she had merely to placate me, use her woman's tricks, in order to find refuge in my party. She didn't doubt her ability—Jinny had not had much reason to doubt her chance of success, in this or any other contest where the weapons of her sex were pitted against man's determination. But it was not man's determination that barred her, now. It was the immense, impersonal might of the untamed wilderness; of Papua.

She did not know. She stood up, and came to me, with the red of sunrise on her red-gold hair, smoothing her torn shirt, and pulling down her tattered breeches, calling to work the smile that had gained a drop of new sweetness from every man who fell victim to it, until now it was a very honey-flower, wherein the wandering, kissing bee might drown. She knew her work, this Jinny. She made me, in a minute, forget her rags, her stains, her battered, weary look, and see her but as I had known her, months, weeks ago, on the liner and in Thursday Island. Yet, at the same time, I was angry, and sorry—for her and for myself.

"JINNY," I said; and again "Jinny, Jinny!" It seemed as if I could find no other words. I remember thinking, foolishly, that the only appropriate address would be that of Sir Isaac Newton to his dog—"Diamond, Diamond, you little know the mischief you have done!"

But Jinny suffered under no such inhibitions. She was only too eager to talk.

"My oath, Phil," she declared, catching me by the loose folds of my shirt, as if she feared that somehow I might vanish—"My oath! I thought it was all in with me, I did, straight. Last night I couldn't catch up, and I slept stridelegs in a tree. I was that afraid to be on the ground, and there was things creepin' about above me, and I couldn't see a sign of your fire anywhere, same as I'd seen it other nights, and I fair gave myself up for dead. And so this morning, I started off just as soon as I could see me feet, and I said to meself, 'Jinny, my girl, if you don't find him quick, the robins or whatever-it-is will come and cover you with leaves today.' So I hurried and hurried, and when I come on you just like that, it took me queerly, and I had to sit down, because of course I was afraid that you'd be angry—Phil, you're not angry with little Jin, are you? Phil, I just had to come. You don't know how useful I can be—I can cook bonzer, and I don't eat hardly anything meself, and I'm afraid of nothing; give me a gun and see. . . . I'll wash your clothes and make your bed—What are you laughin' at? I'm glad I've made you laugh. Are you laughing at me? I don't mind. I don't mind anything, now I've found you, and I know I'm goin' with you."

"Jinny, my dear," I said—and I did not think my blackhaired Dian herself would grudge the kiss that went with the words—"Jinny, I only laughed because one doesn't wash anything to speak of, on these trips, not even oneself—and if you look at my bed" (the carriers had taken down the flies, and were busy packing up) "you'll see it doesn't need much making. Tell me," I said—for I wanted to put off the bad moment as long as possible—"tell me, have you had any breakfast?"

"No, nor dinner last night," she said. "I hadn't anything left."

"Then you must breakfast at once." I called a carrier, spoke to him and set him to make tea and bring meat and biscuit. It hurt me to see how Jinny eyed the food, yet how sparingly she wished to eat of it.

"There's plenty," I said. "Take all you want."

"I know there isn't plenty," she said, nodding her head wisely. "I know all about this explorin' trick. You take all you can carry, and when it's done, you're done. Have you"—she spoke through a mouthful of biscuit—"have you made any depots?"

"Any *what?*" I demanded, scarce believing my ears.

"Depots," she repeated, with absurd pride—and yet it was pathetic too. "I know all about them. You bury the food same as a dog buries his bone, and you come back for it again."

I did not think it worth while, there and then, to attempt explanation of the somewhat complicated system of depots, or caches, by which, in certain kinds of country, an explorer ensures his safe return. I was more concerned in knowing where she had got her information; it had a second-hand, crammed sound. But I did not ask her then. I reflected—and the thought fetched a sudden sigh—that there would be plenty of time—too much—for talking over everything, in the next few days.

SHE had eaten her meat and biscuits; she had thirstily finished her pannikin of tea, and hesitatingly consented to drink another. Life was creeping back into her tired face, and with it something that I knew my next few words must kill—hope.

"I thought you'd be angry," she said, setting the pannikin down upon the ground. I said nothing. I took her scarred, burned hand, and began smoothing it gently in mine. Angry? She little knew. The very rage of hell had been in my heart, when first I looked down the clearing, saw her sitting there, knew what it meant to me, and knew, in the same moment, that she could never, if she lived to be a hundred, understand what she had done. Understand? Could any woman understand that? Could any woman, if she did understand, bear without shriveling up, the knowledge, so damning to her sex pride, of what the Unknown meant to me and to my like? Endure to know that not even the thrills she herself could offer were greater than the rare ecstasy of standing, first and alone, where none had trod before?

No. She could not understand. Jinny, and Diamond, were alike; they "little knew. . . ." How could one be angry?

"Leave go of my hand," she said suddenly. "There's something you aren't telling me, Phil. What is it?"

"Jinny," I said, "there are a great many things you haven't told me, and I propose to know them before very long; but there's plenty of time for all that. Plenty of time," I repeated. "For anything either of us wants to tell the other. On the way."

"Yes," she said. "The way to the place they call Tatatata."

"The way to the mouth of the river, I mean," said I.

The pannikin clinked as she hit it with her heel, jumping up. Over the verge of the near precipice it rolled, and tinkled away, lost forever.

"Oy!" said a cannibal carrier, quite as if he had been a character in a Mayfair novel.

"You're goin' back again?" cried Jinny.

"We're going back."

"Because of me?"

"Because I find it necessary to go."

"Phil, I'd have drowned myself rather than—if I'd known. Phil—don't do it, old boy. Let's go on and chance it. I'm not afraid of anything. I'll go till I drop dead. Let me, Phil." She was almost crying; she held my sleeve tightly, and shook me, in her eagerness.

"Jinny," I said. "We're up against hard facts. You'd drop dead, as you call it, before noon today. You—"

"I done well up to this, anyhow. I kept with you, Phil!"

"You kept with me because the work hadn't begun. If you had been an hour—five minutes—later in finding me, Jinny, the meat-ants would have been picking your bones tomorrow, maybe before you were dead. If you come on with us now, we might be able to help you along—"

"Yes?" Her eyes glowed with hope.

"For a day or so—carrying you in a litter where we could, and slinging you up precipices with bush-rope like a tied pig. That, Jinny, would cut our day's work down by a third, maybe a half. We should get a little way, and turn back. I prefer to turn back now. Don't cry, Gin-Sling; you never cry, you know. What's that war-cry of yours— 'Drink hearty, you'll soon be dead?' Let's hear it again," I clapped her on the back, assuming a gaiety I was very far from feeling.

One of the swift changes typical of her sad, merry kind, seized hold on her without warning. She flashed into sudden fury.

"For twopence," she said, "I'd kill him—swine!"

"Who's the swine?" I asked. But she looked at me sidewise, and made no reply. I saw she was shaking with rage.

"Go easy," I told her. "We're going to have a real picnic trip down the river—no hurry, everything pleasant. There's nothing to cry about and nothing to get in a paddy about. I'm going to talk to the carriers; take any rags you want out of my swag while I'm away."

I LEFT her alone, a forlorn slim figure, in the new sun of the day that was to have begun my march to victory. All the great bush was awake and getting to its business of the day—it didn't care that my ambitions were wrecked and my plans, of years, thrown into the Romilly River.

There was a river, I did not doubt, somewhere ahead, that would have borne my name. There was a range, untrod by white man's foot, that I had meant to call the "Pia Laurier." Now—

If it had been a man who followed me, I think I should have given him what stores I could spare—which would have been little—turned him round, and told him to make his way back as he had come. But a woman—Jinny—in the midst of wild, unknown country, with hostile natives never far away, and a hundred minor perils threatening every step—to say nothing of that last, worst peril of all—the danger of getting lost—

I HAD never questioned for an instant the necessity laid upon me to take her safely back; save her from the consequences of her folly, at any cost. But I could not pretend to myself—however much I might pretend to her—that I was glad. It meant the using up of my stores, the going back to Daru to refit. There was one stray trading station a little nearer, but it certainly would not trust a penniless man; and I should have to loot my own store in order to get enough. These things were unavoidable. Losing the carriers was possible; they might desert as soon as they saw the sea, and I should have to recruit over again. Weeks of delay, months maybe, and all the time—

All the time—!

A thought struck me, hard. I was repacking some of the boys' loads, when this idea came to me, and made me pause, with a tin of meat in one hand and a packet of trade beads in another.

For a moment I lost my head; I seized the packet and the tin, and hurled them, as the nearest things on which I could vent my rage, down into the gorge below.

"Oy!" cried a carrier, as he saw the precious food disappear.

The bead-packet struck a thorn, burst open, and hung there raining drops of scarlet, white and blue, down into empty air.

I stared at it as if it had held the solution of some long puzzled over secret.

"All the time—" I said to myself. "All the time—somebody else would be getting away. . . . I think I can agree with Jinny in calling him a swine."

I found her waiting by the baggage. She had taken a shirt and a pair of trousers out of my swag and dressed herself in them, throwing away her rags. She had smoothed her hair with my comb, and washed her face with what I inferred to be the last of our drinking water. . . . No matter; I could send a boy or two to fetch more from the bottom of the gorge; what was time, now? I suppose I shall not be believed when I say that she had powdered, and used lipstick; but it is a fact that neither the jungle nor the near approach of death from hunger and exposure, had availed to separate Jinny from her make-up.

The queerest mixture of kindliness and anger filled my heart, when I looked at her. After all, if what I suspected was true, she was scarce at all to blame. After all, she had risked her life, was ready to go on risking it, just for the doubtful blessing of my society. Was it a crime? No, by all the gods—no matter what it had cost me.

The way to the Romilly River was easier than it had been coming up. We got there in two days and camped to make rafts, since no canoes were now available. And on the first of the nights of our camp, Jinny and I came to an explanation.

CHAPTER VIII

WE WERE seated cross-legged upon the platform of Jinny's tent-fly, which had been mine—I slept with the carriers now. A hurricane lamp, slung from the ridge pole, made an orange transparency of the little canvas shelter. Outside it was quite dark, save for the carriers' fires; you could not even see the Romilly River, though its course was curiously buoyed out in air by the hovering green lights of myriads of fireflies. The smell of the forest was all about us, that stabbing, sweet wild odor, with a nameless intoxicant in the heart of it, that no one has ever been able to define or name. The dark pressed upon us with a feeling different from that of other dark—it was as if one had slipped, somehow, outside the kindly earth, and found oneself alone in the terrible gulfs of blackness that lie beyond the stars.

I don't know whether Jinny felt it. She sat with her legs crossed, playing on an imaginary banjo, and mimicking the sound with closed lips, very cleverly—if one had felt disposed for such cleverness. I was not so disposed, feeling, indeed, a good deal more like going down to the Romilly and drowning myself in it, than listening to revue tricks—but I respected the pluck that set that imaginary banjo twanging.

Jinny the light-heeled and light-hearted. Jinny—

"Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea,"

had her standards, and acted up to them. And assuredly, one of the rules by which she guided the frail, fair craft of her life was "Never let your man grow dull in your company."

Somehow she influenced me, drove the dark mood away. Somehow, by and by, she had me laughing. And the great dark about us pressed less heavily; the world narrowed, suddenly, to a cosy small tent with a lantern and a pretty girl lighting it up almost equally. . . . We had had little talk on the way down from the hills. I had pressed the pace to what I thought Jinny could stand, hustled the carriers along in front of us, helped Jinny where she wanted helping, but spoken scarce at all. I had one of those fits of silence on me that take the men of the wilderness, now and then, and I had seen no sufficient reason for trying to combat it.

NOW, with a day or two of waiting, while rafts were made, with the still river beside us, unseen, unheard, yet felt, as a river is always felt, calming, soothing—with the scent of night about us, and pretty, unlucky Jinny, trying to make the best of everything, I felt strangely quieted. It seemed to me that I owed her something. She though me hard, unkind. She had as much as said so, only that day, "You look soft, Black Sheep," she had said, "I reckon it's that black satin hair of yours, and your eyes—they're black and soft—but you're not soft; my oath! Sometimes I think you'd clink if I hit you."

Perhaps the memory of this came up in my mind. I didn't want to be a churl.

"What's it about, Jinny?" I asked her, as she ended her play. "What's the smooging for? Want me to go out and buy you a pair of silk stockings?"

She laughed; stretched out her shapely dancer's leg, disguised in my khaki trousers.

"I don't want anything of you," she said, suddenly grave. "At least, not anything you'd want to give me this side of the grave. . . . I've made up my mind to tell you all about everything—all about my comin' along after you, I mean—only I can't tell it when you keep lookin' at me that hard and cold as you do."

Again I reproached myself—Jinny was always making me reproach myself.

"Tell me anything you like, my dear," I said, "and I'll listen, and I'll look at you just any way you like."

"Ah—will you?" said she, with a strange tone in her voice. "I don't think!" Then, suddenly changing to a bright, light note—"Well, the beginning of it was that day when you talked to me on Thursday Island, and said no woman couldn't go exploring; that put me in a bit of a paddy, because of course I didn't believe it and I don't either—"

"We'll let that go," I cut in, a trifle wearily. I knew I should never succeed in making Jinny see the truth. Pride of sex, so strong in this pretty thing who was little else but sex, would for ever blind her eyes to certain hard truths concerning the muscular superiority, in the last resort, of men.

"Well, I was feeling pretty bad about it after you went. And it just came into my head, I dono how, that I'd get a boat and run over to the other side, and see, like, how things were going on with you and your trip. Of course, Sir Richard Fanshawe, he was meanin' to go and get whatever it was, before you, and Spicer, he was backing him up; I'd got that much out of the old boy, while we was friends, because of course he wanted to make love to me, and I wouldn't, and that's when they will tell you—And then I found that you weren't there at all, at Da—what was the place?"

"Daru."

"Yes. Seems you'd gone to Port Moresby after all. . . . Phil, wasn't that fair awful about Sir Richard gettin' drowned? Did no one ever find out anything about it? Well, you know," and she ran on, without waiting for an answer, "when I heard you'd gone there, I was—I was—Phil, I was that snake-headed I could 've bit you. I'm tellin' you all the truth, Phil—I didn't want you to go, because I knew she would be there, and I thought, let her get safe married to Sir Richard, and it'll be all right, because she's the milk and water kind that won't ever think of another man again; that's what I thought. So when I heard you'd gone there—and he was dead— Are you going to marry her?"

It burst forth like a cry. If I had been angry with her for her slighting words about Pia, I was not angered now.

"Jinny, my dear child—who do you think would have me for their daughter? I'm as likely to marry Miss Laurier as you are to marry one of the king's sons," I answered her.

She went straight to the heart of that sophistry.

"Yes, but if you was to find something up at Tatatata, that was worth fortunes and millions—"

"I am quite sure, if I had a million to-morrow, Mrs. Laurier would not like me any the better." (Yes, but I thought to myself, she would let me marry her daughter; she hates the type I represent—all wise women hate it; it's anti-social—still, if I were a Bolshevik from Leningrad, with a million in my pocket, she'd swallow her hatred, hand over the girl— Curse her, and all like her!)

This went through my mind in a second, while Jinny was going on—

"I hadn't anywhere to stay at Daru, ——, what a place! All mud and mangroves—I'd go off me blooming nut if I had to live there. Well, there was nowhere to stop, so that Mrs. Maidstone, she give me a bed; she's pi, but she isn't a wowser; I can put up with Mrs. Maidstone and old Bob. Where was I? Oh, Spicer, he was there too. I know Spicer; he used to be on the halls, years ago, but he wasn't any good at that, so he got a job as gentleman's gentleman to Sir Richard. Well, he and I clicked pretty well; I haven't no respect for Spicer, but he can be as pleasant as the next to talk to—pleasanter than some that . . . Well, Spicer, he said to me—'Why don't you up and after him, when he starts? He'll be back here to get his boys which is waiting for him,' says he, 'and then he'll be off by the Romilly River, and if you take a canoe along the coast,' says he, 'I'll put you up to all the tricks' he says, 'and you'll catch him up before he can get out of the bush country, where he'll have to cut his way,' he says, 'and you'll show him', he says—'what you can do after all. And who knows,' he says—"

She came to a sudden stop. "I'm tired talkin'," she snapped. "I could do with a drink."

I fetched her water from the river. She drank it, and scolded me in the same breath. With an oath, carelessly, almost offenselessly used, as was her fashion, she reproached me for rashness.

"ARE you mad, Phil Amory," she cried, "dippin' water out of one of these rivers at night? I may be a new chum, but I know that much; you might as well dip it out of the cage of the lions in the Zoo, with those alligators—Hear him!"

In effect, a bull alligator, challenging his kind, at that moment lifted up his voice in a whining bellow that shook the very poles on which we sat.

"You wanted a drink," I told her.

"That's how you—what you—" She held the pannikin in her hand. She seemed to struggle with something unexpressed. "You—you'd do that," she went on, "and you wouldn't—" The rim of the pannikin hid her face, her lips that seemed to be trembling. She was a long time finishing the water; when she had done she handed me the empty tin, and said, looking away, "Isn't there a story about a king or some feller whom—whose chaps fetched him a drink from the well when the enemy was firin' something awful on it, and when it came, he wouldn't have it, he poured it out, because it had risked the lives of brave men—so the beggar said?"

"Some one in the Bible," I ventured.

"Ah—I used to read it; Sunday school, you know, and teachers what used to give you pink and gold cards. . . . I fought a little girl for hers, I remember, because I couldn't get none of my own; I bit her. . . . She give them up but she says, says she, 'You're an 'eathen, Jinny Treacher, and you'll come to a bad end—and the bogies will come and carry you off some day.'" She burst out laughing. "Well, I didn't throw the drink away," she said, irrelevantly. "Now I've told you everything, Phil Amory, and more than you want to know, so if you'll kindly leave my little wooden hut to me, I'll go bye-bye."

"*You'll leave my little wooden hut for me,*" she parodied, shrilly. The black forest about us sounded to her high singing.

I HAD thanked her, and I was alone—alone with myself, and the knowledge of my wrecked ambitions. Things on the whole looked worse than I had supposed them to be. Jinny did not know everything. So far as she was aware, Spicer had been the moving spirit in the plot to stop me and bring me back; but I guessed the hand of Sir Richard Fanshawe in the matter. Now Spicer was weak, I judged, but Fanshawe had been foresighted, efficient; if the plan were his, it was a good plan, fully organized, and one might expect developments from it yet. It was as certain as anything could reasonably be that a rival expedition was even now on its way. One hope only I had. My road was not the road of the dead miner, Grace; I had used my knowledge of the country, and a certain bushman's instinct that had often done me good service, to beat out a new track. If I were right—and I was all but sure of that—the new way would cut down risk, time, expense, above all, enable me to get to Tatatata faster than any one else could. Faster, it might be, than any rival trip that had started already; I wouldn't give up all hope of that, even now.

UNDER the hanging hurricane lamp that, in the bush, has shone upon so much weariness, so much despair and fear and triumph and hopeless pluck, I drew forth, once again, my copy of Grace's last notes, written on the day when famine and sickness drove him to turn back with his task still undone.

Grace was leading an exploring trip, financed by a moneyed partner who wished to solve one of the many unsolved problems of the New Guinea back country, and, incidentally, place his somewhat undistinguished name upon the map. To cross from the Romilly to the Fly had been his ambition.

There was—and still is—a big unknown area in those parts, and Jackson had been bitten by the desire, most natural, as I saw it—of finding out what, and who, might be in the untraveled space.

Grace had, no doubt, been moved by considerations of a more practical kind. There is always the possibility of running upon some valuable mineral, in these unknown places; death may wait round any corner, but so again may fortune, and the miner of Papua is always ready to risk one, for the hope of the other. I had never met any of these people—Grace, or Jackson, or the widowed girl whom Grace had loved and hoped to marry—but I thought I could reconstruct the whole business; sympathize, even, with these shades in a land of shadows, who, but a year or two ago, had been living, loving and struggling people, like Jinny, like me, like Pia Laurier.

AND here were the three of us, and two more, entangled in the very lure that had brought those others to death. . . . Did the ghosts of dead men ever haunt the places where their loves and interests had lain on earth? If so, I thought, the ghost of Grace could not be far away from me that night, as I sat on the end of the sleeping platform, under the lamp, and pored upon my copy of the words he had written in the bitterest hour of his life—

> January 5th—No sago in sight. Stores very low. Jackson anxious to turn back at once. After dispute, agreed one day more. Ridge in front should give wide view when climbed. Boys weak, rebellious. Dysentery threatening. Two arrows shot into camp last night after dark, no one hit. Seen no natives for eight days.
>
> January 6th—Today at four we turned back, having topped the ridge, which I have named Grace Hill. Height above sea level 4,350 feet. From top of hill most remarkable sight. Whole country for range of many miles all sinks down to one center like water flowing out of a basin when plug is lifted. Not volcanic. Can not say what, Jackson can not say, suggests some sort of subsidence. Distance unusually clear, with glasses could make out dark spot in middle of this huge basin, like hole. Urged Jackson attempt further travel, but he declares himself unfit, insists immediate return. One carrier died today. Three in very poor condition. Natives appeared on distant ridge, war-danced. On return march found effigies, human figures, with faces whitened by lime, laid across path and speared through heart. No attack. Camped on small unmapped river where we camped night of fifth. Deeply regret necessity return.
>
> Whole formation suggests gold. If so, have struck biggest jeweler's shop ever known,

"Jeweler's shop," a phrase current among Papuan miners, means a pocket, or series of pockets, of extreme richness.

> Jan. 9th.—Limestone country reached again today. Covered about five miles, hard going. Carriers very weak, feet badly cut. Jackson somewhat better.
>
> 10th—Much regret to say Jackson killed by natives today, evidently belonging to same Tatatata tribe that threatened us at Grace Hill, and left effigies in path. When stopping in stream bed for lunch, shower of spears suddenly thrown from dense bush. One went through Jackson. I fired into bush and ordered carriers to do same. Heard one or two shouts, but on entering bush later nothing to be seen. Attended to Jackson best I could, he did not live three minutes, seems to have been hit in heart. Buried him eight feet deep, piled boulders on top, resumed march. Reached creek I had named Jackson, about five. Camped. More dysentery among carriers, two in bad way.

The record continued, relating deaths of carriers, further attacks by natives, terrible straits for lack of food and, in the limestone country, lack of water; the finding at last of a small patch of sago that enabled them to secure enough food for a last rush back to the Romilly River. Grace had written little after that, as he was barely able to reach the coast alive. There, at a little trading station, he died; leaving his gear with the trader; and I, coming along some while after, had bought the stuff for a song. Grace's diary didn't interest the trader, who had native blood, and could barely read and write. I was as sure as any one could be that my eyes were the first to rest upon it. I had been absolutely sure—till the day I met Jinny Treacher on Thursday Island—that the very word "Tatatata" was unknown to any save myself; that the suggestion, the possibility of immense treasure, contained between the lines of Grace's diary, was my secret alone.

Now that I had passed the trading station again, ascended the river, no Sherlock Holmes was needed to tell me how the secret had got out. That story was contained in one sentence—Grace had written to his girl. He had no doubt hoped to get better, get back to her. He had done exactly as I had done with Pia, as Sir Richard Fanshawe had done with Jinny. Told his girl his secrets.

And Grace's girl had gone out, in an influenza epidemic, not long after. But before that, she had, in her turn, told some one who was, probably, her lover; might have been her lover all along—Fanshawe.

I seemed, in that moment, to see all humanity a network of love, every one passing secrets along from lover to lover. Government secrets—didn't every European country keep clever unscrupulous women in its pay?—business secrets; family secrets; secrets of scandal, of money-making, of the turf, of scientific discovery, of politics, of the army, the navy; pleasant secrets, disgraceful secrets. Told by a man to a woman; told by her to a man; passed on to a woman again—always between sex and sex at first, then spreading out, from man to man and woman to woman, till it was no longer a secret. . . . And I wondered, knowing well the disintegrating power of love upon reserves hard as iron, resolutions tough as steel, that any secret, in this love-filled, sweetheart-filled world, should ever be kept for a day.

Well—if Jinny had not spoiled it for me, I had had a fair chance of tearing the heart out of Grace's secret, sweethearts notwithstanding. I might have a chance yet. At all events, I would not give up while a shred of hope remained. On that resolution, I went to sleep.

NEXT morning there was fine music, when the carriers got to work clearing and felling the timber for rafts. Timber felling is one of the world's jolly elementary sounds; you can't help but like it, if you are right made—as you like the many voices of sea and rivers and rain, and the roar of winds and fires, and the slatting, drumming noises of sails in a big breeze. If you have never listened to felling, you don't know the meaning of that term so frequent in cheap poetry, especially eighteenth century cheap poetry and so little understood by those who use it—"echoing woods." You want to hear an ax-stroke thrown back by the breast of the forest as cleanly as a ball is thrown back by the side of the house; you want to hear a bird sending its exultant, mysterious cry to half a dozen points of the compass all at once, to hear the calls and shouts of the timber-workers magnified, made sonorous, lifted into poetry—or at least poetry's raw material—before you can understand to the full that careless epithet.

If I were seventy, sick and old and dying, I think I should feel my heart leap up, as Wordsworth said his heart leaped at the rainbow, every time I heard, in the great woods, the crack of an ax among timber.

I shall no doubt appear somewhat mad, when I confess that I told a good deal of this, in other words, to Jinny, while I was tramping about the banks of the Romilly, directing the boys, picking out trees, and once in a way taking a hand with a full ax myself; it "got on my nerves" as women say, to see the carriers fiddling about with three-quarter axes, in that glorious timber. Jinny tramped with me. She said she didn't like to be left alone, because of natives; and that she loved to see trees felled. "It smells so bonzer," she said, sniffing up the heady essence of all things green and wild, that fills the air when felling is under way.

"What do you think?" I asked her, after an hour or so of fitful talk.

Jinny was nonplussed. She had a good enough headpiece of her own, despite lack of education.

"I don't quite get what you mean, Phil," she said, thoughtfully chewing a rootlet of wild sugarcane. "But I lay there's something in it. I seem to feel what you say, if I don't understand it. Me, I'd live in a humpy in the bush with the right person—tomorrow, and I wouldn't look back, or be sorry for anythin' I hadn't got. You don't believe that, maybe, but it's true. I've had so much, Phil. I've eaten me dinner—lots of dinners—and I wouldn't be hankerin' to know what's the taste of asparagus, or if champagne's as nice as people says it is. That's in a manner of speakin'—figurative, you know," she hastened to explain. "What I mean—"

"I know. I understand. You mean that over-civilized people need what the bush can give, even more than others."

"Maybe I do, and maybe I don't," she said, eying me sidelong. "But Phil, there's one thing I can tell you, and if you don't like it, you can lump it. *She* won't."

"Who won't what, Jinny? You're getting mysterious."

"Well, if I'm mysterious, I'll clear things up. I tell you straight, if you think the Laurier girl is going to live up rivers and in blacks' camps, you've got another think comin'."

THERE was a moment's silence. The river made no noise; quiet as death it slipped along, tea-green in color, between green banks of trees. Whip-like, the axes cracked in the forest. An "orderly bird" began calling sharply. "Orderly!" it cried, from some unseen fastness on the far bank. "Orderly!" You would have sworn it had summoned the defaulter a dozen times, was getting out of patience.

"Where are you going when I get you back to Daru?" I asked Jinny, presently. I do not care to say how angry I was, that she should dare to speak of Pia before me.

Jinny flushed scarlet at the snub. One of her lightning changes flashed across the mobile face that was so near to mine.

"I can go to hell for all that you care, can't I?" she said, in a voice that was suddenly half a dozen tones higher. She seized a stem of white bush lily, and began tearing the flower to pieces. It hurt me, somehow, to see her do it; that flower—tall, slim, white, delicately sweet—had always reminded me of Pia.

"No, Jinny," I answered, watching the petals fall like rain from her angry fingers, "you're wrong there. God bless me, girl, do you think there's any man alive could see as much of you as I have, and not be fond of you? Care what happens to you? You bet I do. I'm going to see you safe to Daru, and safe into a boat that'll take you back to Australia, which is a jolly sight better place for wandering little girls to be in than this cruel country.

"But I'll remember you always, and you mustn't forget me."

She was silent; she stood beside me on the river bank, tall and thin and motionless as one of the long palms that grew in the sheltered verge of the bush. Her beautiful hungry face, with its avid eyes, was fixed on the sliding Romilly river—the Romilly, that came from God-knows-where, that ran to a sea still unvisited by ships in the days when Jinny and I were born. The sound of the carriers' clearing had shifted farther away; hack, hack, went the axes, dully, muffled by distance. There was a pause; through it arose, exultingly, the voice of a Mambaré cannibal, singing the death-song of the tree, followed by a rending crash, and shouts in chorus.

There is something in the fall of a great tree that lets things loose; things that have nothing to do (on the surface) with trees. Genevieve Treacher had been one woman in the instant before that crash. In the instant after, she was another—another of the many Jinnies, to know all of whom would have needed great part of any man's days; would have been worth it, perhaps.

SHE swung round; she faced me, tall as I, filled, as I, with the fires and forces of youth; strong, supple as a tigress, brave as a tigress, a woman made for the wilds, if ever one was so made. Her breath came sharply through her nostrils; with a magnificent gesture never learned in any dancer's school (and indeed, the schools but spoil such women as Jinny) she flung both arms out, wide to the finger-tips.

"I'm not askin' marriage, Phil Amory," she said. "I'm askin'—I'm askin'—just a hut down somewhere at the mouth of the river, and me waitin' for you to come back, since you won't have me on the trip. And I'll stick to you—and follow you—" She fought for breath. "You pulled me away from the sharks," she said. "You sent your trip to blazes and never cared.

You walked in among them howlin' alligators to get me a drink of water. You're the first real man I've ever—ever—Phil, will you leave me in that hut when you go?"

She was as modest, almost virginal, in her self-betrayal as any girl. I don't know how, but in that moment I recognized a truth that, so far, had not come my way. I realized how such a woman as Jinny may regenerate herself; I realized, with a wrench of soul and body painful beyond all telling, that I, and no other, was the man to help her to it.

But between us stood the wraith of Pia, my white rose, my star, Pia who some day, God willing, should pass the ivory gate of dreams with me, into a paradise of which I was unworthy, which, nevertheless, I could not give up, if the salvation of a hundred Jinnies stood in the way.

If there had never been a Pia—

Jinny, like many flame-haired, flame-spirited women, was ever so little clairvoyant. She read my thought.

"Phil—strite, Phil," she said. "Is it because of me goin' gay, same as you yourself have gone, I'll lay—that you won't? Because, if that's all—"

I couldn't answer her. I put my hands on her wide, thin shoulders; her face was on a level with my own, and I kissed it. "You're the best girl in all the world, and I love you, Jinny," I said.

Unerringly, she read my meaning through my words.

"I'm the best girl—but one?" she said.

To deny Pia was to trample on the cross of my faith.

"Yes," I answered, feeling as if I had struck her.

"Then, if there hadn't been any Miss Laurier in the world, it'd 'a' been all right with you and me?"

I could not answer her. There was no need. She flung me away with a suddenness and strength that all but sent me down among the trampled palm leaves by the river side. She was transformed, instantly, into a hag of the streets. As she might look in twenty years' time, battered, destroyed, so she looked now, in one awful moment of prophecy. She gave a scream that reminded me of the screams of torn horses during the war, and ran wildly down the bank of the river. I don't know where she thought she was going—maybe to a spot farther on, where the current swept, deep and oily, past a high corner of the bank—where, if she had leaped, the alligators would have had her before I, or any other, could have done anything to help—but she was, in another moment, checked, as I was checked in my pursuit, by the amazing, unexpected sight of a Government launch on a lower reach of the river, rapidly heading toward myself and Jinny.

THEY stopped as soon as they saw us, and slung out a dinghy. I saw that Bassett was in charge; Bassett, with a score of native police, standing on deck and looking very businesslike in their uniform loin-cloths and jumpers of navy and red, bandoliers across their chests and rifles laid handy on the hatch. The launch was drifting with the current; Bassett secured her by a cable passed round a tree, before he came up to me and to Jinny, who was standing white, staring, but more or less self-possessed, a little distance away. I wondered how much he had seen; realized that I was never likely to know, Bassett being when he chose, as close-mouthed as any crab. . . .

"Well," he said, with a certain forced cheerfulness, "so you've saved me half my trip; that's very obliging of you."

"May one ask," I demanded, "what the blazes the Government is doing up here?"

"You can ask without the blazes. The Government has business anywhere. We've been sent up to save this young lady from being carried off by cannibals like the star in a picture show. The G. S. was at Daru in the *Tauri*, and news came down the coast—native telegraph, you know—that a white 'sinabada' had gone up the Romilly in a canoe with half-a-dozen boys, meaning to strike inland. So the G. S. turned a handspring and had three cat-fits, and packed me off without my lunch. So here's the *Tauri* to take her back; only I see you've been beforehand with us." He glanced with interest at the figure of Jinny who was contriving to look amazingly dignified in my khaki shirt and trousers. "By the way, Sheep," he went on, "what's become of your expedition?" For he, like every one else, down West, had known of my departure.

It was difficult to answer him. "I came back," was my lame reply.

"Well," he said, "Well"—after a pause,

during which he had looked swiftly, keenly, at both of us. "I suppose I'm to have the pleasure of fetching you along to Daru also?"

I was thinking rapidly; calculating just what this new turn in my affairs might mean. The *Tauri* was a fast launch; she could take me home in a day and a half; half a day to fix up matters there, and get stores—those eternal "stores," in which the history of Papua, to the casual observer, would seem to be written. Then a day and half back, in the *Tauri* again—I calculated that the Government would owe me so much for doing its work at my own cost. Half a day for contingencies. Two days to get through my four days' cut in the bush. Eight days in all from now ought to see me—should see me, if I were alive, once more at the point where I had turned back.

Eight days! I might have been half across the Pia Laurier Ranges. I might have known—what perhaps nobody would ever know, now. Because the natives would undoubtedly have been roused and warned; might be waiting with the table laid and the cooking pots on—so to speak (as a matter of fact, I knew that they didn't use pots, preferring a simple roast). Well, there were always two sides to that matter, and I had permission to use armed carriers. If there was no one ahead of me—

"I SUPPOSE," I said to the waiting Bassett, "that you didn't see any sign of another party on the river."

Bassett was busy lighting a cigaret.

"You suppose wrong, then," he said, his head bent over his hands. "There's a prospecting and exploring party down at the river mouth at this minute." He did not look at me as he spoke. Bassett was—is—a little gentleman.

"How soon can we get away?" was my reply.

"As soon as you can chuck your carriers on board, and get you and this lady on."

He kicked me, slyly, and I replied, as intended, with an introduction to Jinny.

"I'm sorry to offer you such rough accommodation, Miss Treacher," he apologized, fixing her with his grave ministerial stare. "But you are fairly lucky to be alive this minute, which I suppose is some compensation."

"Do you?" said Jinny. "I don't," and turned her back on him. I could only tap my forehead, and nod significantly at Bassett. "The Bush," I explained, as he moved a little away. It was explanation enough, for any one who saw less clearly through a stone wall than Bassett usually did. "Well," I thought wearily. "I don't see how anywhere, anyhow, I could have done otherwise than I did—but I seem to have got myself and other people pretty thoroughly into the soup over it, all the same."

We made a very silent party, dropping down river. With the current, and the speed of the launch, it was a comparatively short journey. Dusk of next day found us on the opening reaches of the Romilly's estuary, with the Gulf of Papua, flat and gray as a pewter table, opening out before. There was a long strip of beach at the river mouth; you could scarcely see it at that hour, because it was almost all black—black mud, black sand, black mangrove mazes, with a bare tufting of leaves, that in the daylight shone sickly, sparkly green. But if you could not see the beach, you could see, quite clearly, that which stood upon it—the pointed shapes of several canvas tents, A smallish, flat-bottomed ketch, swayed dizzily to some invisible pulse of the water, out beyond the beach, where she was anchored. Cooking fires had been lit on shore; their light was doubled in the dusky tidewater, as if the fires had soaked through mud and sand, sending roots of raspberry-colored flame down into the bay.

"We'll stop here for a few minutes," said the magistrate. "I didn't call going up; just hailed them, and asked if they had seen anything of a white woman,"

"What did they say?" I asked.

"One of them—Caxon it was, I think; I hear he went with them—shouted back that they hadn't, and asked who she was, and what it was about."

"Caxon!" I said. "Who were the others?"

"Only one other white. You know him —Spicer." He gave an order to the brown, bare-limbed steersman; and our boat took a wide sweep, and began heading inshore. Jinny, who had gone down into the cabin as soon as we started, now put up her head for the first time, silently scanned the encampment, and as silently slipped back again. A feeble glow arising shortly after, told us that she had lit the cabin lamp.

"Caxon!" I thought, as we rushed to shore. "Spicer is not such a fool as he looks." For Caxon, old-time goldminer, and survivor of a past era of mining successes, was about the ablest prospector who ever washed a dish between Daru and the Mambaré.

"Do me a kindness, Bassett, will you?" I said, when the rattle of the anchor chain had died. "Don't mention to any one ashore just where it was that you picked us up."

"Right. You not coming?"

"No fear."

"Miss Treacher coming?"

"I don't—"

Silently Jinny's head appeared above the coaming, cutting off my words. She stepped out on deck. There was still some light left; I could see that she had found Bassett's store of clothing, and looted it ruthlessly. A cummerbund of dark-blue silk circled the waist of her—my—trousers; she had white socks on, and a silk tie about her neck.

A clean, starched and ironed handkerchief—nobody but Bassett would have had such a thing, on such a trip—peeped out of her breast pocket. She has used the make-up from which no adventure separated her, in true artist fashion; just a touch of geranium on her faun-like mouth, and a darker line on eyebrows that were perhaps too golden; no rouge, no dredged-on powder; magnolia paleness only, and a demeanor that "registered," to perfection, the qualities of shyness and reserve.

I looked at her in amazement, as she swung lightly down into the boat, avoiding my eyes (she had not looked at me, or spoken to me, since we came aboard). I saw her go ashore with Bassett, disappear among the tents, and then the dusk came down in good earnest, and there was nothing to be seen save those long-rooted flames upon the verge of the water, and the drunken swaying of the ketch's riding-light.

Before I had time to grow more than a little impatient, the boat was back again, and the launch under way. After the steamy heat of that motionless spell, it was good to feel the wind again upon face and arms; to see the black bow of the launch stemming through stars on stars, and more stars, myriads of them, sparkling and tossing in our wake, as if we drove through some miraculous field of gold.

GOLD! The word halted me, tripped me over my own thoughts. Gold! What had Jinny been saying, doing, out there in the camp? Why had she been so anxious to go ashore, and why, now that she had returned, was she still keeping hidden, avoiding sight or sound of me?

Bassett was sitting on the cabin roof, a whitish blur in the dark. I edged up to him—one had to walk cautiously, in that welter of arms, cases, sacks, carriers and police—and asked him point blank—

"Did you—any one—say anything ashore?"

He knew what I meant. He did not look up, or turn his face, but he answered immediately, in Bassett's own crisp, precise way—

"I saw Spicer. I asked him what the delay was; asked if I could assist in any way. He said no; it was all right; they had stopped because he wished to buy sago; they'd be off tomorrow at daylight. I got back to the boat then. Miss Treacher,"—he spoke carefully, seeming to weigh his words even more than usual—"Miss Treacher stayed behind for a while; I waited for her."

"Was she—" I stopped; it was difficult to phrase.

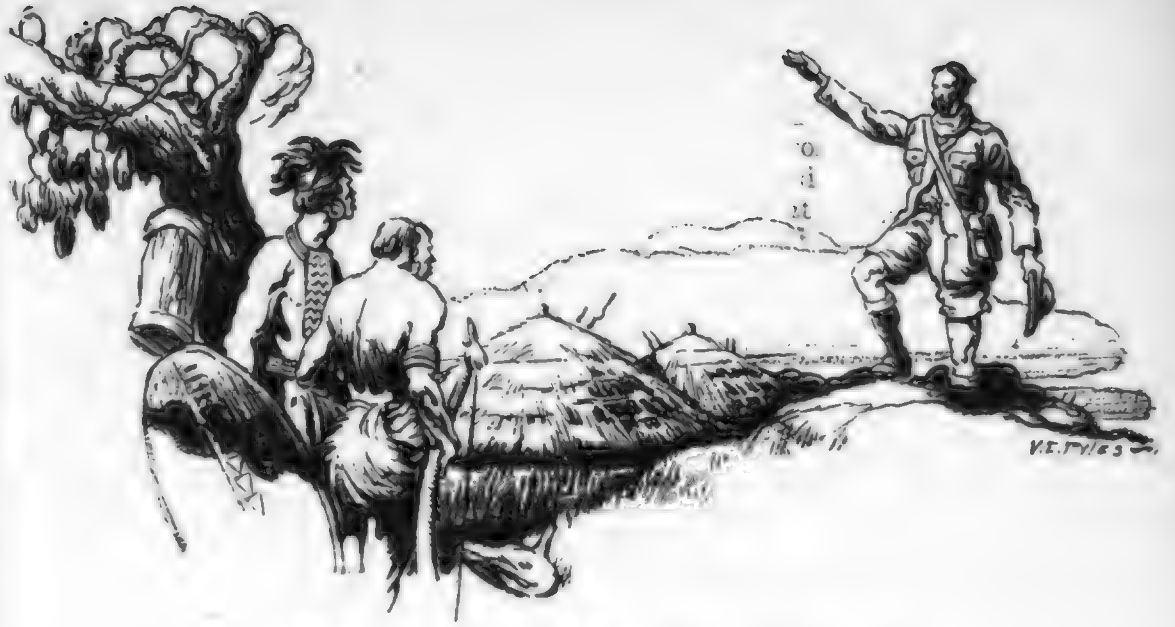
"There appeared," said Bassett precisely, "to be something in the nature of a friendly understanding between her and Mr. Spicer."

"Did you get any idea—any—"

"The light was rather imperfect; but I gathered an impression that she was pointing out to Mr. Spicer something in connection with the course of the Romilly River."

On purred the launch; the stars fell away right and left from her wake. Going forward, where I could be more or less alone, I sat on deck, and digested as best as I could this unwelcome news. It did not help matters, or make me more hopeful, that I heard, once in a way, a sound like some one, down below, trying to stifle bitter weeping.

In the next chapters Amory discovers
gold, but is arrested for killing Fanshawe



Two Strong MEN

A Bizarre Tale of the Amazon Country

By DON CAMERON SHAFER

“I, JOAO DA CALVERO, one of the oldest *seringales* of all this Amazon country, confess to many mistakes, many errors of judgment, in outfitting these dangerous and uncertain expeditions into the jungle. Except for this I could sell you all the *caoutchouc* in my *defumador* at the price you offer and still make a handsome profit.”

This Joao da Calvero, his swart face a mass of tropical wrinkles, his long mustachios white as the snows of the higher Andes, leaned back in his little iron chair beside the sidewalk table at the Café de Paree during the fashionable hour in the principal street of Manaos and deftly rolled another cigaret. The motley crowd strutted slowly by, a babble of mellow Portuguese, of harsh Indian dialects, of musical negro laughter, for this was the Pearl of the Jungle, this was Manaos, the capital of the Brazilian Amazonas. More than a thousand miles up the great river from the sea and at the very edge of the unknown tropical jungle—a little frontier city in the wilderness calling itself, seriously, Little Paris!

“If one always won, were always right,” said I, prompting Joao for the story suggested, “then there would be no zest to life.”

“Even so, *senhor*,” he nodded, with a hissing sigh of regret, “but, if only we might read men as we read books, life would be so much easier and more pleasant!”

“There are weak men and strong,” I admitted, “and we must read them in their records of achievement.”

“You speak true words, *amigo*,” he smiled, “even if the idea be not in the nature of a great scientific discovery, but, I have learned, my friends, that there are two kinds of human strength, two very different kinds of strong men. There are giants among men, great, big, tall and powerful men, and there are also those who, though weak and frail physically, are possessed of great strength of mind. And of these two, strange as it may seem, the latter is by far the stronger, though the knowledge of this recently cost me one of my best *seringuerios* and ten of the strongest, bravest *caboclos* that ever pushed a canoe into the unknown waters of that *terra incognita*."

MANAOS, "Little Paris," French food and French wines in the best French manner—in a narrow street of a mud-bank city where half-naked Indians and ragged blacks touched elbows with fashionable men and women! A city by contrast only, its six thousand people bulking large in that vast wilderness of tiny frontier villages and a few scattered Indian communal houses. A city where one's beefsteak is cut from the insipid flesh of the cowfish, or manitee, and a filet de sole is carved from the white meat of the giant *picarucu*.

"We have had our black days," Joao continued reminiscently, "alas, too many of them. For long years you foreign buyers did not visit us and the *caoutchouc* in my *defumadors* hardened and spoiled. My brave *caboclos* were in rags and took to shooting fish that they might live while the long, rock-scarred canoes warped and rotted on the river bank. All because the price of wild rubber went down and ever downward until it no longer paid to send our *seringueiros* into the jungle."

"That," I explained, "was before the English followed your excellent example in coffee and took control of their plantation rubber to regulate and stabilize the price."

"Of a surety," he agreed, "I know. But they were lean years when we all but starved. Then came at last the happy day, the never to be forgotten day, when our agents down in Para sent up word that they wanted rubber and would pay a higher price for it than we ever knew before. With those magic words prosperity came racing back again. I even sold the old stuff I valued as worthless at a profit. And this money I placed immediately into one of the largest rubber hunting expeditions I ever sent up the Rio Negro."

This is Joao's story, and not mine, and he shall tell it in his own manner as with eyes and hands and body he made the very words to live, though here and there he violated the accepted rules of story telling.

ONCE more there was a fine price for rubber.

We rang the church bells, guns boomed, men huzzahed with joy.

Rubber was life to us, life and good living. It was food and wine and song and laughter all coined into yellow gold. A high price for crude rubber in Para, higher than ever before, meant credit again, gold in our empty pockets, and everything that gold will buy here in Manaos, down in Para, in faraway Rio de Janeiro, even in distant Paris which is the goal of every wealthy Brazilian. No wonder we *seringales* raced to see who would be first to launch an expedition into the rubber fields, the first to get our eager fingers on your American gold.

Years since the trees were bled, years for new wild trees to grow, and there promised a rich harvest for the first upon the ground. Years when the jungle had been given back to the savage Mangaromas and the still wilder Juapery Indians. And all these wild men had become arrogant and bold with no one to tame them and put the fear of guns in their hearts. It was but a little while ago that these Juapery savages emerged from the jungle and sacked the town of Moura, near the mouth of the Rio Branco, or White River, and gave us a good scare even down here in the streets of Manaos. But when did men ever care about a little danger when there was gold to be had?

So, as I say, it was a race, but the race is not always to the swift. With such speed as the money from my old rubber could command I repaired my largest canoes and manned them with the boldest *caboclos* I could find and at the head of this enterprise I placed my man Pedro, one of the best *seringueiros* in all Brazil. This expedition cost me many thousands in gold but I had every confidence in Pedro, a giant among men, a fighter who knows not fear, a driver who always could get the most out of his men.

EVEN then I knew something of this strength of the head, which is so often greater than that of the hands, and in this race I resorted to cleverness. Whereas all the others loaded their canoes with heavy stores and many gathers, making them slow and most difficult to handle in swift water, I allowed Pedro but ten experienced *caboclos* and only necessary stores so that they might travel fast and light.

"I have nothing but wind in my head," laughed Pedro with understanding, "if I do not know how to get plenty of laborers when I find the rubber trees."

"The less labor to be paid for out of our profits," said I, "the more for both of us."

"Give me guns," was all he asked.

It was a proud day for us when our two big boats pushed away up the brown river amid cheers of the joyous populace gathered there to speed them to the rubber gathering. I was not the first, a large expedition having gone up the night before, and others were to follow day by day. But, among them all, there was not another such a man as Pedro, the giant, and I knew that if there was rubber to be had he would get it.

NO SOONER had the various expeditions vanished up the river, the excitement of outfitting and departure died away, than all was as dull here, or even duller, as ever before. While we waited for our rubber and prosperity we welcomed every diversion. Now that we were lighthearted again the streets echoed our laughter. We enjoyed many gay pranks and innocent jokes upon one another. And then, one day, came this student, this joke of jokes!

He came in by way of the Rio Maderia, in a little dug-out canoe, a shriveled monkey-man in rags and tatters, with no other belongings than a few bags and boxes, filled with old bones and worthless Indian objects, with skins and skeletons of little birds and beasties which no one ever saw before. And this truck he watched over and guarded just as though it were really valuable. A little dried-up man and his starving body seemed to make his big head abnormally large. He wore thick glasses before his wide blue eyes and his yellow beard was cut close to his bony jaws. He was instantly an object of mirth as well as curiosity upon our streets where you can see in a week all manner of strange human creatures. A man from your own country, *senhor*, from some northern institute of learning—and I had supposed all college men were great athletes! A professor, or a doctor, mayhap both, come way down here, as he did, though no one believed him at the time, to study these wild men of the jungle, the wilder the better. I confess we thought he lied, or had been drinking too much *kaasi*, which produces strange visions, when he told us where he had been. For no man, or so we thought, could live a day with those wild cannibals and not find himself beheaded or in the cooking pot.

HOWEVER weak of body this *Pequenino*, this Little One, he did not lack for brains. He was the strongest man mentally I ever knew. He seemed to know everything. He had the gift of tongues. I give him credit also for being absolutely fearless and there was nothing less than magic in the way he could make friends with any Indian. He was on his way home but no sooner did he hear that we were sending large expeditions into the farmost rubber country than he begged to go along. He insisted that this was the chance of a lifetime and ran from one to another for a chance to accompany such a party.

"It is too late," I explained, "all the *scringueiros* have gone."

"Couldn't you make up another expedition?" he begged.

"There are no more men to lead such an expedition," with regret.

"I will lead it!" he cried, all excited. "Get the boats, the men, the equipment and I will take it farther into the jungle than any rubber hunter ever went before."

Which gave us the best laugh of the season, for we are always particular to pick only the biggest, the strongest, roughest men to head these dangerous excursions into the Indian country.

"You," garuffed Senhor Duquero, "you would lead a rubber-hunting expedition into the jungle?"

"Certainly!"

"You do not know a rubber tree when you see it."

"Heh!" said he, arching his bushy brows, "I know all the trees in Brazil!"

"It takes years to learn this rubber gathering business," said I.

"I learned the language of the Mangaromas in five days," said he.

"Those wild Juapery brutes," laughed some one, "would pin back your ears and swallow you at a gulp."

"It would be worth it," grinned he, "if I could study their religious ceremonies for a few days."

It was then, in an evil hour, I conceived this greatest joke.

"So be it," I cried, keeping my face straight with great difficulty, "you shall lead a party into the rubber country."

"*Hei!*" gasped a friend, thinking I had gone mad.

"You shall go," I promised, fluttering one eyelid so all could understand it was a joke. "We gentlemen of Manaos will outfit you for a rubber hunt up the Rio Negro. You shall have all the jungle you crave and we will amuse ourselves here while you are gone laying wagers on how much rubber you will bring back."

"Good!" he cried, innocent enough. "I shall go at once."

My friends all entered heartily into the joke. Behind his back we laughed until the tears came. We laid wager upon wager as to just how far up-stream he would get, how soon he would come floating back. Some even bet that he would not come back at all. Not one agreed that he would pass the first bit of rapid water where many men and giants' strength are necessary to haul the boats through.

Down by the river we found two old canoes, deemed unfit for the hard up-river service, and these we turned over to the Little One. For a little silver we hired a few worthless halfbreeds to undertake the venture with him, well knowing, from past experiences, that they would desert before they passed the ruins of Moura, that they would not venture within five kilometers of an Indian arrow. And we gave him credit at the stores for such outfit as he deemed necessary. Such an outfit! *Hei! Hei!* We thought the man crazy. He didn't take food enough to last ten days. He stored the canoes with nothing but his scientific instruments, his books and papers, and a few worthless trade goods. Trade goods! Those wild men want nothing of us but our heads and we give them nothing but bullets. And he went away actually dreaming of trading bells, tin whistles, copper wire, old coats and things for rubber!

AT THE last moment, when he was about to push off, our hearts relented—we were afraid of carrying this joke too far. We could not see this innocent go forth to certain death.

"Wait," I cried, "wait! You have provided no rifles, no ammunition."

"I am not going to war," said he.

"You may not know it," said I, "but you are!"

"This is entirely a matter of trade," he insisted.

"I will send down my repeating rifles and a sufficient supply of ammunition."

"I do not even know how to shoot a gun," he smiled, "and I am afraid of them."

"*Ave Maria!* Then you go forth to death!"

"In the interest of science," he smiled, "many good men have died. And shooting at wild men, as I have discovered, only makes them wilder."

"Well," laughed Senhor Duquero, "no fear that they will eat you anyway. There is no meat to pick from your bones."

"A good head," he answered, "is all a man needs up here."

"A good head," roared Senhor Duquero, "is what every wild Juapery wants!"

"Pedro will bring yours back if you lose it," cried some one.

We were certain he would not get far enough up-stream to endanger his head, if he escaped a few stray arrows from hidden savages on the river banks.

"Whatever rubber you bring back," I joked, "I will pay you the full exchange price in Para."

"If I can bring back enough to repay you gentlemen for your trouble," said he as they embarked, "I shall be satisfied."

PEDRO the giant, a giant in courage as well as strength, at the head of the finest rubber hunting expedition that ever went up the river, ruling his brave men like a lordly *cachique*. A tall and mighty man was my Pedro, with muscles bulging beneath his dark skin, black hair and short beard curling tight to his great head. He roared his orders in a voice of thunder and his heavy hand fell heavily on any disobedience or lagging. And those men of his, those ten bold *caboclos*, more or less Inca, calling themselves Peruvians, but strange blood raced their hot veins, red blood and black as well as white. Once in the jungle they threw aside their clothes and with them went whatever little civilization they might have had. They were all men large of body, powerfully muscled to drive the heavy paddles, to lift and to carry. And they were bold and courageous, fighting men, such as only Pedro could pick from the crowds of experienced rubber hunters along the waterfront of Manaos.

They went up the Rio Negro with black-bearded Pedro standing in the bow of the leading canoe, a heavy repeating rifle in the crook of his left arm, his mighty body all but clothed in heavy cartridge belts, with two revolvers and his silver handled *machete* by his side. It is a hard river, that Rio Negro, as well as dangerous. They drove up it with all speed, keeping safely to the middle out of arrow shot, until they came to the first *cachoeira*, an all but impassable barrier where the black waters are beaten to a white foam as they come tumbling down through a mighty gorge, tossing about the very rocks, roaring into the steaming caldron below.

"Into this lovely soapsuds!" shouted Pedro. "In my *manitees*, my water pigs, my wet mules!"

He harnessed them to the ropes and by brute strength they dragged those heavy boats through the rapids, along the quieter water near the shallow shore, over wet and slimy rocks, through boiling whirpools and racing channels. No man knows why the Rio Negro is black, black and yet clear, roaring its sable length out of the unknown. I cannot tell you why this black water beats itself on the black rocks to a snow white foam. When they were in the smoother water above the first rapid Pedro drove them on against the current, far, far upstream. Other rapids barred their way but each time they hauled the boats through them with the ropes. And after a while they came to a place where the river plunged down from a considerable height, a sable curtain of falling black water up which no canoe could be hauled.

"Out!" shouted Pedro above the bellowing of the water. "Out my oxen—around we go!"

His own *machete* was first into a fist and soon a tall, smooth, round tree came crashing down. Thus they made rollers and cleared a pathway around the falls up which the canoes could be rolled as though on wheels.

"Ha, those snails behind," cried Pedro, "they shall not profit by our labor!"

And he threw the polished rollers into the flood, for this was a race.

THUS he fought his way up the northern tributary of the Negro, up the Rio Caubery, which is rich in rubber and balata, but remains practically unexplored because of the ferocity of the savages. Nearly all the Brazilians who have attempted to penetrate into that country have lost their lives. Those savages are most primitive. They hide their *malocos*, or communal houses, deep in the jungle. In place of the cheap trade shotguns one sees about here they are armed only with bows and arrows and with the deadly blow-gun.

Pedro, to conserve his supplies, preempted his food as he went along. They dynamited what fish they could, they killed monkeys and ate them, but at every *maloco* he could find he demanded shelter and provisions for his men. At the head of half a dozen riflemen he marched boldly up to the cleared space where the great thatched roof communal house stood in the sun and in the *Lingua Geral*, the language nearly all understand in this Amazon country, which some insist was instituted long ago by the Inca traders, he bellowed out his demands.

"Food!" he roared. "Food for ten men and their chief!"

Woe to any man that opposed him, death to any man that so much as slid his red fist to a weapon.

"Lively now, a shelter for my men and a place to swing their hammocks!"

Once a chief of the Mangaromas delayed to put on his trousers, his mark of rank, before coming out to meet the Hairy One and Pedro struck him to the ground as one dead. They feared him and obeyed him, though they hated him—all knew that back of his heavy fist waited a shower of rifle bullets against which they had no protection and no weapons of equal strength.

Came he at last to that unknown wilderness far up the Rio Caubery and a great forest of rubber trees. Never in all his travels had Pedro ever seen so many fine trees. With shouts of joy the canoes were hauled out upon the bank and they set to work at once with their *machetes* to clear a space for their *tambo*, or camp, and to erect their *barracas*. Pedro was arrogant and brave, perhaps a bit foolhardy at times because he always held these savages in contempt, but he took no chances of being surprised. For the distance of a rifle shot around the camp they cleared away every living thing that would hide a warrior and about the camp itself they built a high barricade of tree trunks and interlaced sharpened branches and thorny vines. From this central fortress they cut many wide *estrades*, or roads, reaching out into the jungle until they had access to a large number of rubber trees.

"By all the saints!" cried Pedro, "here is fortune itself!"

PERHAPS all would have been well if Pedro and his men, each with a small share in the venture, had gone forthwith to work and gathered what rubber they could. But this would take time and the high prices at home, which they feared would not hold, tempted them to madness.

"If we only had a dozen more men," sighed Pedro's lieutenant, "we might all be rich."

"Hah!" answered Pedro with a noisy laugh. "As though I did not know how to get men!"

Now Pedro had been told, indeed, he had seen, that these Juapery people down the river find plenty of servants and slaves among the more primitive Pogas.

"Hie away, my trailing dogs," to his best hunters, "and find me a few *malocos* of these earth-people. I will have men to gather this rubber if I have to raid hell itself."

The hunters found the Pogas, a few of them, but they found no *malocos* to raid. These people, it seems, have no permanent homes, no roof over their heads. They roam like beasts through the jungle, beasts living on beasts, and they slept here and there in the leaves like the wild *peccararies*.

"Never mind," said Pedro, "the Juapery have plenty of such. We will go and take them. And," with a wink, "if any of the latter get mistaken for Pogas due to the darkness it will be their misfortune and not ours."

Soon his scouts discovered two large *malocos* of the Juapery not far away up a small stream and that night Pedro and his men raided the first. With masked lights they stole over the water and through the jungle, up the worn Indian paths, and quietly surrounded the great house. At a given signal they charged, shooting and yelling, lighting flares, making noises sufficient to scarce the wits of a jaguar. The Indians, badly frightened and completely surprised, never had a chance to rally or fight. They fled as best they might into the underbrush, abandoning everything. And all that they could knock down and catch were quickly chained and tied to be led away to the rubber gathering. The next night the other *maloco* was raided in this same manner with the result that Pedro now had some thirty wild men to do the work and they took also seven young Juapery women for their pleasure.

"There are five who refuse to work," reported the lieutenant next morning.

"*Heil Heil*" grinned Pedro. "I have a cure for that."

He brought out a heavy whip made of braided rawhide.

"Let them be chained up until but one toe touches," he ordered. "And now monkey-men, let me tell you, no man alive has ever refused to work when asked to do so by the singing voice of this little persuader!"

They worked, chained two and two they toiled at the hard labor while the *caboclos* stood over them with loaded rifles. In his greed and haste Pedro ordered the great rubber trees cut down and gashed to bleed upon the ground and the sap collected into little hollows where it coagulated into cakes and was taken by the slaves to the *defumador* to be smoked and cured. Do not imagine that this was accomplished without great difficulty. The work was long and hard, the wild men but sullen beasts in their chains. If they slipped their irons and tried to run away they were shot down instantly. The lash always crackled about their ears. If they protested or gave a sullen look, it was answered instantly by Pedro's ready fist.

NOW those Juapery are a powerful people. Their domain is larger than all Peru. It is ruled over by a zealous old chief who has a taste for war. He might have spared a few Pogas without anything more serious than a few arrows at long range from the dense jungle—for there are plenty more of those earth-people to be had for the taking. But Pedro had captured his sister's son, also the daughter of his blood-brother, and the spirits of six Juapery warriors cried out for vengeance. The witch-doctors, who always change into jaguars at night, assured him that these strangers were not invincible.

The rubber trees came crashing down, the thud-thud of flashing *machetes* echoed through the wilderness. Pedro and his *caboclos* did no work themselves, standing as armed guards to watch and direct the slaves. And everything that stirred in the jungle about them, any suspicious sound in the matted vegetation, was greeted with rifle balls. All day the thunder of their guns kept the Juapery warriors at a respectful distance. And at night the rubber hunters withdrew to the safety of their *barracado* and stood guard until fair daylight.

These Juapery warriors knew that rifles

cannot see in the dark, any more than a blow-gun may be sighted, and just before dawn of the second day a horde of naked fighting men came racing and shouting from the jungle, swinging their war clubs, following swift upon the flight of many arrows. This attack was so sudden, and the savages so many, that it would have carried all before it, rifles or no rifles, except for Pedro.

The guard fired his rifle, a rolling staccato of shots, at the first alarm. And his warning cry was not necessary to bring every fighting man to his feet ready to shoot. They ran forward to the protecting barricade, shooting, but in that thick darkness it was difficult to hit anything and the flashes of their own guns served to blind them. Warriors dragged the tree trunks aside, they cut the barricade, they came swarming into the camp.

"Back! Back!" bellowed Pedro. "Rally to the *defumador!*"

As they fell back Pedro leaped out ahead of them, facing the savages, his thick fingers bristling with yellow sticks of dynamite, a glowing cigar in his grinning lips. One after the other he threw these sticks, short fused, into the midst of the charging men. The very skies let loose their thunder, the blinding flashes of the terrible explosions lit up the jungle camp. Though only the first explosion did any damage the rest served to drive the terrified warriors panic stricken back into the jungle.

"*Hei! Hei!*" laughed Pedro. "Did you see those monkey-faces scatter! Before this rubber is rafted down the Rio Caubery they shall learn that Pedro is a strong man."

A strong man, yes, but something more than brute strength is necessary to get a cargo of crude rubber out of the wilds. But from that hour, no warriors appeared to test his strength and they went about their work the next day unmolested.

"These strange men control the thunder and the lightning," explained the witch-doctors, "but our power is also great. They are, after all, but monkey people, as evidenced by the hair upon their bodies which they do not pluck forth, and, as you all know, the very scrapings of the *curari* pot equal the lives of many monkeys."

"It is true," said the chief, "and therefore we shall hunt them like monkeys and not like warriors."

For the next few days all was quiet about the rubber camp and the gathering went ahead with speed until a great store of it was smoked and cured beneath a shelter by the river bank, much more than the canoes could hold. So out of a very light but strong wood they made a huge raft, fashioned with chains, so that it could be taken apart to send piece by piece through the rapids while the rubber was carried around.

A few more days and they would have been safely on their way home.

"My little fire-crackers," laughed Pedro, "put the fear of civilization into their red hearts."

HE SHOULD have known better. Those savages are always safest when they fight, for they have practically no chance against modern repeating rifles. The very fact that no warriors tried to cut off the *caboclos* in the *estrades* should have warned Pedro.

Then Carlos of Obidos, standing guard with a companion over five men collecting rubber that was ready to be cured, saw what he thought was a peculiar insect whiz past his face trailing a raveling of white cotton—the next instant, before he could understand, his fellow guard was struck by a tiny, sharp reed arrow no larger than a knitting-needle, wound in the middle with a bit of wild cotton and its point stained a deadly black.

"Look out!" he yelled, dropping to earth and firing his rifle. "Poisoned arrows."

Pedro came running with other guards, every one shouting and shooting at random into the jungle where nothing could be seen. When it was over the guard who had been struck was dead and for the first time fear entered the strong hearts of those brave men.

The next day it was much the same. At another part of the field one of the guards was hit several times and when the invisible enemy was finally routed three of the ten were dead.

"We have rubber enough," said Pedro, who could not afford to lose more men. "Home, my lads, home!"

Now they stood some of the slaves before them as a shield, between them and the jungle, and fell to loading the canoes and piling the rubber securely upon the raft.

There was need for haste. Pedro did not spare himself nor his men and he took the last ounce of strength from the conscript labor. A cocked rifle in his big hands he watched the jungle walls, bellowing his orders. In that few weeks the jungle had started to grow up again about the camp but it was hardly enough to hide a man and it was a good long rifle shot to the green wall of the forest, certainly beyond range of any arrows. But Pedro feared that they might attempt one more desperate attack when they saw that he was leaving. In his lips a glowing cigar, at his feet the open box of dynamite.

"Load it carefully, evenly," he shouted to the men on the raft. "Take your time, nothing can harm us now!"

He did not see, he could not see, a Juapery warrior, stained green as any grass snake, wriggling forward toward him, a long nine-foot green tube pushed carefully along before him. The end of the tube was thrust through a newly grown clump of green vines, the man, safely hidden, drew from his hair a tiny reed arrow, affixed a bit of cotton and pushed it easily into the polished barrel of his blow-gun. He fitted the mouthpiece to his lips, he drew his lungs full of air—

"Mercy of God!" cried Pedro, snatching at the tiny arrow deep in the thick of his left arm. He dropped his rifle and snatched at the arrow but in his haste he broke it off in the wound. "Quick, a knife!"

A man rushed up with a clasp knife and thumbed it open. With this Pedro gashed his arm again and again to cut the splinter out in all haste. Then he stood there like a dumb man, his black eyes fixed upon the deep, red clotted wound in his mighty arm —a wound from which no blood flowed, so quick and deadly is this *curari* poison!

THE idea of this *Peqenino*, this little student, going out into that wild country of savages to hunt rubber was preposterous.

It afforded us many a good laugh.

But you shall hear—

He had but two old canoes, poorly manned, and his only stores were dried *picarucu* fish, rice and beans. And he did not take much of this because there were so many boxes of his scientific instruments and other useless things and the bales of foolish trade goods which only took up room.

But we didn't offer any further suggestions. We let him have his way, knowing that those worthless water rats, having an advance in pay, would desert him at the first opportunity. And it was even so. They had no desire for the heavy labor of hauling canoes up dangerous rapids. Nor had they any stomach for fighting the savages who contest the way. At the foot of the first bit of rough water they all left him, stealing away in the night in the largest canoe. They did not take with them much of anything because this student fellow took the precaution to sleep on top of his cargo.

Right there I lost a hundred in silver wagered that this fellow would be back in five days. He was alone, facing a long rapid, and far too weak to carry even one bale of goods around the portage, but he did not come back to us then. He went straightway to a *maloco* of the Mangaromas, which is to the east of the rapids, to recruit new paddlers. He was the first white man ever to walk into one of their villages alone and unaccompanied by an armed guard. And to make matters worse, Pedro had stopped there for provisions and one of his men had struck a sub-chief over the head with his rifle barrel. When he stood at the edge of their clearing and shouted a greeting the warriors came swarming out to kill him. But he stopped them with a gesture. They fell back in surprise when he greeted them in their own tongue, astounded that this man should know their song of approach.

"I have come," said he after a hasty look around, "to drive the demons from that man's head."

He had seen, from the edge of the jungle, the medicine men working over the subchief who was still suffering from the blow on his head. And then he explained that he was a great medicine man and had come a long ways to do this favor. He shaved away the injured man's matted hair and exposed a bad scalp wound wherein he said he could see the evil spirits writhing. I strongly suspect, as is so often the case, that the wound was fly blown. But he cleansed it with strong chemicals and sewed the scalp together so that it began to heal instantly.

Then he arrayed the head chief in a red coat and a plumed hat and passed out some lesser trade goods to the leading men. That night a feast and dance were given in his honor and the next day he hired, with the trash he carried, a number of the best men to take him upstream to the far reaches of their territory.

In this manner, from village to village, this little man with the big head traveled slowly upstream toward the rubber country. He did not hurry. At each *maloco* he lingered to study the people and to collect curios. Ordinarily you could not hire one of those savages to do an hour's work. But they would labor harder for this man and a few bits of bright cloth, a few trinkets, than they would for Pedro and his whip. Is it not strange? And luck was with him all the way. His food was gone and he lived like the savages, the Indians killing monkeys, armadillos, ant-eaters, the *paca*, which is like a large rat, all with the noiseless, deadly blow-gun. And when no food offered he chewed the leaves of the coca, like all those wild men, which banishes hunger and gives great strength and endurance to the body.

When he did not come back down the river we made up our minds that he had wandered away into the jungle and was dead. Those of us who had lost paid up our wagers and the joke was forgotten. We did not know then that he was far up the Rio Caubery with two canoes loaded with Indian clay pots, ornaments, weapons, ceremonial implements and everything else but the rubber he was supposed to collect.

I GIVE you my word that this little white man did what no man has ever done before. Alone and unarmed he walked up the hidden pathway through the great forest to the principal *maloco* of the lower Juapery.

Now the Juapery, as I have said, are the most ferocious Indians of all that upper Amazon country. They are brave men and do not fear the whites and they resent any excursions into their country. Just before this they had destroyed a party of rubber hunters from Colombia. This student knew this, as he seemed to know everything, and he left his boats far down stream while he advanced alone to make peace with these devils. He knew the etiquette of approach. He came into the great clearing about the communal house singing the song of salutation. He walked boldly into the house and stood there by the entrance as is required, waiting for the chief to approach and inquire his business there.

"Word has come up the river about you, little white doctor," greeted the chief. "Your renown as a medicine man has preceded you to my people and you are welcome."

"It is good," said the student, "but I have not come to you as a medicine man."

"Fortunately you arrive when my own son is all but gone to the Shadow Land from eating of strange things taken from our enemies above here. You shall bring him back to me."

The student did not consider this good fortune but he had to make the best of it.

"Let me see the sick one," he commanded.

The professor took one look at the sick boy and his heart sank within his bony breast. He knew that unless he effected a cure he would, in all probability, be killed and there before him on the palm leaves lay this youth writhing in agony, in a terrible fever and near to death. He had, it was evident, overeaten and of unaccustomed food, raisins and dried corn taken from the Colombian expedition, so now he was like to die of intestinal inflammation, what you people call appendicitis. This student was not a surgeon but he had great skill in dissecting the smallest birds and beasts and he carried with him many curious little knives for that purpose.

"Your son," said he, "is already well along the endless pathway to the shadows."

"You shall bring him back." It was a command.

"I will do what I can," he promised.

RUNNERS were sent to bring his canoes up. He ordered a screen of palm leaves to be woven about the boy in a sunlit corner of the yard. A guard was stationed to keep every one back. When this was done the student purified his hands and began. At first his fingers shook so with fear he could do nothing, not with fear for himself, for he cared only for science, but for this unfortunate lad, who was nothing but an Indian, risking his life in such careless and inexperienced hands. But he argued with himself that the lad would die anyway without an operation and that he owed it to science to do what he could. He had no anesthetic with him, not even the proper instruments for the work.

"My boy," said he, "there is a demon in your side and I must pluck it forth. Drink you this sacred *kaasi* which will give you sleep and pleasant visions while I work my magic to bring the evil forth."

The boy drank and in a few moments entered that strange trance which this drug always brings. While he dreamed the doctor bound his limbs, lest he writhe with pain so he could not work, and opened the body. It was not, he confessed, nearly as difficult as he imagned. It was over in a few minutes, the wound sewed up and bandaged.

"In his side is the hole where the demon came out," he explained to the father. "I have closed it with a powerful drug and wound it with a white cloth so the evil spirit can not get back in again."

"Demand of me what you will in payment," said the chief. "It is already yours."

"A place in your *maloco*—"

"You shall sit by my side."

"Your guest for a time—"

"As long as you care to stay with us."

"And I have in my canoe several bales of fine things which I have brought up here at no little trouble and expense to trade with you for this."

He showed them a small ball of cured *caoutchouc*.

"Hah," said the chief. "I do not understand why you people are so crazy for that useless stuff but it shall be as you say."

"I shall show your men how to tap the trees and collect the sap—"

"There is no need," answered the chief. "I have plenty of it now."

He jumped up and led the way down to the stream side where there was a great store of freshly cured rubber.

"I do not know where it came from, nor why," the chief explained, "but one morning it came floating downstream on a great platform of logs."

It was Pedro's rubber!

I WELL remember the day when my dock boy came running up the street and announced in a loud voice that Pedro and his men were coming down the river.

It was evening and the noisy parrots were flying back across the river to their roosting places. 'Way, 'way off in the jungle a band of howling monkeys took up their booming bedtime song. But the shouts of people in the streets soon drowned all else as every one raced to the bank to see the first load of rubber come down the great river. It was a time of rejoicing, such as we had not known in years, and my friends were quick to congratulate me on my good fortune.

True enough, in the gathering dusk, we could see the heavily loaded canoes approaching, faster now as the paddlers swung into a quicker stroke and their flashing blades threw up a rain of water. Behind these speeding canoes, which I recognized as mine, drifting more slowly down with the current, was a large raft with a thatched hut upon it which could contain nothing else but a heavy load of rubber.

We sent up a loud roar of greeting, amid noisy pistol shots, welcoming back Pedro and this first evidence of our prosperity. Even the tiny cannon at the fort boomed its joy. Fast out of the gloom came those long canoes, thrust eagerly forward by many strong arms—but it was not Pedro!

Not my brave Pedro, nor any of his men.

As they approached I was the first to see that those paddlers were all red men, of that small tribe which stands between civilization as we know it here and the wild men of the jungle. And the man who raised up in the first canoe to answer our greeting was not Pedro—it was the *Pequenino*, the little dried-up figure of this student fellow.

A HUSH came over us, we could hear the canoes hissing through the water as they approached the docking. No one spoke.

"There," this student cried to me as he stepped ashore, "there," pointing a bony finger to the approaching raft, "is your cursed rubber!"

Nor gave he another glance at the precious commodity as he began shouting at his men in their own language to be more careful in unloading his silly scientific specimens.

A great store of new rubber, well smoked and cured, and soon my cargo men were unloading it into my *defumador*. When this work was running smoothly I hurried back to my office to greet this student and to settle with him as best I might for the foolish bargain I had made when he started.

"You have brought back a great store of rubber," I began.

"I have brought back the finest collection of ceremonial objects, war trophies and native pottery ever collected," he cried, the rubber forgotten.

"But where is Pedro?"

"Ah, Pedro," thoughtfully, "you mean the big, hairy giant who left here a few days before me?"

"Pedro, the best, the bravest, the—"

He was playing around in one of his bags and, even as I spoke, he drew out a cured human head, shrunken to the size of an orange, but with the features still recognizable.

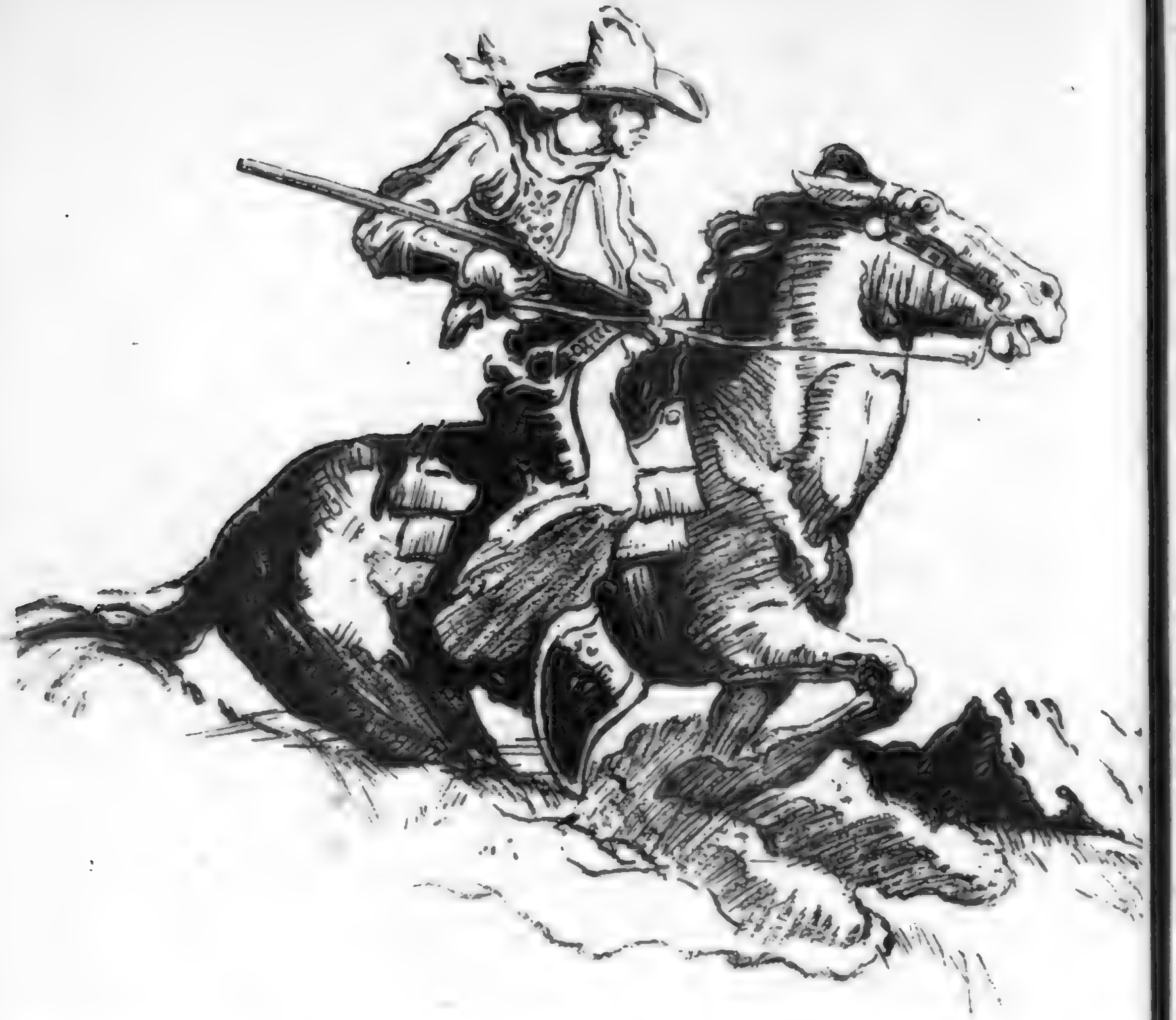
"God!" I exclaimed in horror. "Pedro!"

"Marvelous how they can do this and preserve the actual likeness," he remarked, studying the horrible object, "but, in this case it was not so difficult to shrink it down to the proper size because there was so little inside."

Next Month: Another War Story

By ARED WHITE

In a short novelette Ared White launches a new type of soldier—Sergeant O'Vane (sometimes a sergeant and sometimes a private). The title is *O'Vane's Chevrons* and O'Vane himself is a genuine creation, vain, bombastic, insufferable—and intensely human. *O'Vane's Chevrons* will be followed soon by *O'Vane's Epaulettes*, another brief novelette, and probably if O'Vane can maintain his uncertain equilibrium, more of his adventures will follow.



I

IT WAS summer, and the door of the ranch kitchen was open to the twilight. In the stillness only the industrious bubbling of the coffee pot on the stove and the subdued sounds of knife and fork doing yeoman service at the table disturbed the abstraction of Jerry Guard. Silence and troubled thought were unlike the young rancher, but if his rider, Dobe Kane, seated opposite him, noticed anything untoward he gave no sign.

Jerry sat back from the table, his tempting beefsteak forgotten, and drew from his pocket a piece of cheap white paper. It appeared to have been torn hastily from a bag such as coffee or other foodstuffs might come in; it was unevenly folded, and on its inner side a message was scrawled in pencil.

Jerry frowned at the paper and made a thoughtful announcement. "I was over at O'Neil's today," he said.

The coffee cup Dobe Kane was raising to his mouth hesitated, then resumed its journey, and Dobe drank deeply and lowered it to the saucer before he replied. "That so?" he said. "How—how's the old man?"

Jerry looked up wryly at Kane. "You mean how's Ellen. I didn't go there to see that cussed old fool."

A tight little smile touched the corners of Dobe's mouth. "Well, how are they both?" He disposed of the last of the savory gravy with the help of a piece of bread. "You get kicked off there again?"

Jerry laughed briefly. "No, I didn't. I didn't wait. I walked straight through the house, in the back and out the front, and nobody was home. As I went out the door old O'Neil comes ridin' round from behind the barn. I did the only sensible thing. I walked to my horse, crawled him, and rode right past O'Neil and out the gate without sayin' a word."

The Long Rider

There's a Bit of Love and a Whirlwind of Action in this Western Novelette

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

"Huh!" There was a pause. "What 'd e say?"

"Mostly what he said before, only he hought up a lot of brand new cuss words oday. He told me he bought a sawed f shotgun; I guess he forgot to get shells or it or he would have used it on me."

"Lots of fellas," commented Dobe, wouldn't believe me if I was to tell them hat."

"What?"

"You takin' that from any man."

ERRY GUARD shrugged his shoulders and rose. He was a tall, lean limbed young man of twenty-seven years; his houlders were broad and slightly bent with e careless grace of sinewy strength; his raight legs carried him with the gait of a ained rider, indolent and yet suggesting a arvelous endurance in the saddle. He was an of face, his blue eyes had the brooding epth of a man who has trained his vision on unlimited distances, and in contrast to the firmness of his tanned jaw the lips, wide and full, revealed the leaven of gentleness and humor in his nature. He was a man of strength and action, yet one who had not left all his dreams behind him in his boyhood.

"God knows it ain't for his sake I take his meanness," he said. "Some day Ellen's goin' to marry somebody and move away—I dunno who, though I wish I could say—and then her uncle is goin' to be alone. That day I'm goin' to call on him personal; I'm goin' to take away his gun and bend it in two and teach him a little common manners."

"I wouldn't talk about that often," said Dobe softly.

Jerry glanced oddly at the cowboy, as if he sensed an undercurrent of subtle meaning, but he returned to the paper. "Look at this," he directed, holding out the slip. "It come just before you rode in, and I ain't made up my mind yet what to do. That Mex who sells wood in town got off his wagon and brought it in. He said Ellen came running out when he passed her place and asked him to take it to me. Now what's the answer?"

Dobe Kane read the message on the paper, one evidently scribbled in a hurry:

> JERRY:
> Please come over right away. I must see you. Manuel can not read and he knows nothing; do not talk to him about this. I must see you, please!
> ELLEN.

The cowboy looked out through the open door and over the green sage. The corners of his eyes grew wrinkled in deep thought.

"What does she mean, Manuel knows nothing?" demanded Jerry. "I don't care what he knows."

"Why don't you go and find out?" suggested Dobe. He did not look at Guard, and his face was oddly drawn.

"Man, I can't trust myself! If you had that old fool ridin' you like I have you couldn't either. It takes me a month to work up enough self-control to stand him. And I won't make Ellen go sneakin' out to meet me in town or somewhere. It ain't what he says to me, I can take that; it's the things he says about her. If she'd only listen to me—"

"I know," said Dobe. "It's not a new story. It's been done before. He's got her buffaloed with his 'orphan' story, and the sacrifices he done to bring her up after her folks died. The more he rants, the more she's determined to pay off that debt. Ellen may be dead wrong, but she's sure dead game."

"Huh!" Jerry grunted in disgust and swung about.

"Well," pursued Dobe, "so you're not going over?"

"Who the hell said I ain't!" Jerry was in the act of taking his Stetson from a hook, and he slammed it on his head angrily.

"Oh," denied Dobe softly, "not this waddy, not in all his born days." Dobe Kane was younger than Jerry, a little slighter in build, but the marks of a land of vast grotesque loveliness, of cruelty and tenderness together, were indelible on him as well. He was a rider bred, a man of little education but shrewd native intelligence, intensely loyal by instinct, and little inclined to quibble over the niceties of right and wrong once he had made up his mind on any course of action. A smile constantly lurked in the corners of his quiet gray eyes, and his mouth was touched with the irony in his nature.

He watched young Guard stamp out of the ranch-house and cross to the barn, and on his face, lined alike by weather and hard experience, there came a look of regret, of wistful sadness, foreign to its usual impassive cast. It was almost as though these two, after three years together in labor and friendship, had come to a parting of the ways seen only by Dobe; as though in this twilight they had said good-by.

II

IN THE road in front of O'Neil's Jerry reined in and watched the house for a moment. It was very nearly dark, and only a thin line of sunset still glowed along the ranges to the west. The house, a plain two-story building, showed only one light, the pale gleam of an oil lamp in the kitchen. Beyond it were the barns, the corral, and further the fences of the pasture. There was an air of stillness about the place that was subtly disturbing, and though Jerry dreaded the encounter with old O'Neil.

The horse, a sound bay mare who responded to his very moods and who gave her master a quiet, wide-eyed adoration, carried him in the gate and to the back door of the house. There he dismounted silently, leaving the bay with reins atrail. She would not stray.

Jerry could not account for the manner of his approach. He was not afraid, nor did he come to eavesdrop, yet he crept to the door and stood before the panels in perfect silence. The bay aided him by complete immobility.

He heard a murmur of voices. There were two, Ellen's and another, a man's. It was not the voice of old O'Neil; he realized that before he gathered a word that was said. It was a gruff voice, one that talked in a monotone of insistence, not unkindly, yet firm.

Then suddenly Jerry Guard was aware that Ellen was weeping. This discovery shook him to his depths; it set the scalp at the back of his head to bristling with instinctive fighting rage. Ellen the self composed, Ellen the strong, had been humbled. Her insistence in the note had not been that of simple urgency, but of actual need!

Jerry did not stop to reason the thing out. Seizing the knob, he turned it, flung the door inward, and stood over the threshold.

The kitchen was larger than his own, and from the big range against the far wall to the large board cupboard opposite it was a place of comfortable living, plain but substantial. In addition, the Spartan touch was replaced here by the order and scrupulous cleanliness that only a woman's hand gives the domestic scene. A table in the center of the kitchen, covered with a figured red cloth, bore the large polished metal lamp. Seated at this table were Ellen and a large framed man in riding clothes. Jerry knew him instantly, and he was startled out of his fury by the surprise of seeing him. Heavy jawed, iron gray of hair, black and hard of eye, a simple, conscientious man, Sheriff Eben Murdock was a well known figure all over the country, a fighter and a determined officer of the law. But what brought him here?

The two swung about instantly, and Jerry's questioning gaze went to the girl. She was startled, somehow not with surprise entirely, but with the suddenness of an expected blow. She sat erect in the kitchen chair, the soft lines of her firm young figure chastened by the simplicity of a blue house dress. Her wide blue eyes, calm usually, afire when she was stirred, stared at Jerry with an intensity he could not understand. Her face, pale against the darkness of her hair, clear and firm, strong even in its delicacy of feature, was deeply troubled.

"Jerry!" she exclaimed. "Oh, why didn't you come—?"

"Just a minute, Ellen," interrupted Murdock. He rose from the chair slowly. "I'm glad to see you, Guard; you're just the fella I was going to look up. Come on in."

Jerry took a step inside the door, and hesitated at the message that Ellen's eyes flashed to him. He was puzzled and uneasy. Was it a message of warning? All of Guard's anger had disappeared when he identified the man inside, but the feeling of danger, if anything, had increased.

"How come, look me up, Sheriff?" he inquired.

"We got something of importance to talk over. Come in and shut the door."

JERRY made up his mind quickly. There was nothing the sheriff could have on him. He entered and pushed the door to behind him. Ellen sat back in her chair and a pallor came over her face. Mutely her eyes told him something that was beyond his grasp, something she seemed to think he would understand.

"You got a gun?" demanded Murdock. He drew close, and though Jerry shook his head curtly, passed his hand over Jerry's pockets and under both armpits.

Jerry Guard had sufficient respect for Sheriff Murdock, but this move brought a flush to his face. "You got a devil of a nerve, Murdock," he said. "Since when is it again the law to carry a gun out here?"

"Since about four o'clock this afternoon, for you," the officer replied. "I reckon I don't need to go into detail."

"I think you better."

"Jerry!" spoke up Ellen. She rose and looked into his eyes. "Don't you know?" She seemed to plead with all her being for the answer.

"Know what? Good Lord, Ellen—"

"Let me handle this, Ellen," cut in Murdock. His voice, despite its abruptness, was gentle to her.

"Now, Guard," he went on, "you were here this afternoon, weren't you?"

"For a minute, yes."

"Glad you're willing to save trouble on that point. This is yours, ain't it?" His hand held out a cheap little notebook Jerry usually carried with him for memoranda regarding the stock or orders and messages. His name was on it and samples of his handwriting scattered through it. Before he felt in the inside pocket of his vest he knew it for the book that usually rested there.

"Yes, that's mine," he admitted.

"Good. Now walk in the living-room ahead of me."

Mystified but willing, Jerry went to the closed door leading from the kitchen and stopped with his hand on the knob. He glanced around at Ellen. She was watching him, pale and wide eyed with strain, her hands gripped together on her lap. His gaze robbed her of her strength. Mutely she turned away, her lip white between her teeth.

A powerful emotion clutched at Jerry's heart, and he took an impulsive step toward Ellen. But Murdock moved to block his way, and his words came as a command. "Go on," he said.

Jerry obeyed. Something was driving the sheriff, and it must be pretty important when he ignored the girl's suffering. Jerry moved through the darkness of the living-room, feeling for the table on which the lamp rested. He struck a match to find it better, and in half a minute the room glowed with light from the circular wick. It was a place of no superfluous comfort; a worn carpet was on the floor, a table, a desk, a couch and several straight-backed chairs were about.

"Now what?" asked Jerry, looking for a cue in the sheriff's face.

"Yonder." Murdock nodded across the room.

Then Jerry Guard first noticed that which had drawn about the ranch-house its air of subdued tragedy, that which made clear all that had gone before. Stretched out on the couch against one wall, and covered with a white sheet, was a still, immobile form—the body of a man. And Jerry knew instantly whose body it was. Old Kevin O'Neil was dead.

"He was found in the doorway with a bullet in his heart," said Murdock, as he drew aside the sheet from the grim, pallid features. "And on the floor nearby was your notebook."

JERRY GUARD found it impossible for a moment to realize the full significance of the sheriff's statement. His mind repulsed it as something incredible beyond belief. Yet louder and louder in his being echoed the awful meaning it carried. Murder, it meant; and that Jerry Guard was the murderer!

"For God's sake, Sheriff," he exclaimed, "what are you getting at?"

"Boy, I can't understand it altogether," Murdock said regretfully, "but it looks a lot like you done this. Whether you actually did or not ain't for me to say, but I got to arrest you. Everybody in this part of the country knows how you two hated each other. You want to talk?"

"Why, you're crazy! I don't know anything about this."

Jerry drew close and looked down on the gaunt face on the couch. It was drawn into an expression of repulsive hate, frozen upon it by death. On the dark shirt a darker area indicated the manner of his end. It was the only wound; it had been sufficient.

There was little genuine regret in Jerry's heart, but he was shocked to his depths by the stark grimness of the tragedy. No notion presented itself of whom the killer might be. O'Neil had enemies, any man of his grasping character would have; but at the moment Guard could think of no one likely to take this manner of revenge.

"Sheriff Murdock," he said, "I swear I had nothing to do with this. I was here this afternoon, and I met him; he was alone. I did not even speak to him. He cussed me out like he always does, and I just went away from here straight home. I been there since."

"Anybody with you?"

"Dobe Kane came in for supper. No, I can't make an alibi; he was cuttin' hay all day and quit late."

"What brought you back here now?"

The question instantly checked Jerry's willingness to talk. He could tell them anything about himself, but the note—could he mention that? Why had Ellen been so urgent? Then another thought fairly staggered him. Was she implicated? He could not conceive of such a thing, and yet—!

"You might tell me, Sheriff, how you come to be here?" Jerry countered at random, hurriedly.

Murdock looked his surprise and then grunted with ironic humor. "Who's facin' the charge here, anyway?" he demanded. "You answer my questions. I come here because Manuel Ortega told me something was wrong. Without finding out what, I saddled up and rode. I come on Ellen near hysterical with her uncle lyin' where he fell. She said she'd been in town and hurried back to get supper, and found him that way. Then I picked up your notebook."

Jerry mulled over these facts. Evidently he had dropped the notebook while he was in the house. Come to think, he had taken it from his pocket to write Ellen a note; and had changed his mind because it might only make trouble if O'Neil found it. Somebody had entered the house after Jerry's departure; maybe that somebody had even seen Jerry.

"Sheriff, I tell you I didn't do this," he insisted. "The man who killed O'Neil is this minute probably riding hard while we stand here talkin'. You got to do something."

"I'm doing it."

"You've got me arrested, but I can't tell you anything. Get busy on some other line too."

"I been sheriff and deputy in this county for fifteen years," said Murdock, nettled. "I might know my job by now, don't you think?"

"Oh—all right. Let's get out of here." Jerry moved to the door, and he smiled grimly at the quick step Murdock took in order to be at his heels.

Jerry Guard walked straight to Ellen. She was dry eyed and pale and she gazed into his face, trying to read there what she might. For an interval they stood thus, each afraid to trust to speech. Besides the horror of Ellen's implication, another rose to haunt Jerry. She probably thought the same as the sheriff, that he had killed her uncle. Then why had she sent him the note before calling on the sheriff? But, of course—the notebook had not been found yet. Then another question, how come Manuel said nothing to Murdock about that note? Or did Murdock know all about it?

He dropped into a chair beside Ellen with his thoughts in an unbearable muddle, and his heart torn by her suffering. "Ellen, you don't think I had anything to do with this, do you?"

"I can't—I can't believe it, Jerry!"

Jerry watched her, wistfully. "But you're not sure, are you?"

HER eyes fell away from the rebuke in his, but she did not deny it. She doubted him. It hurt. There had been nothing really substantial between them, but Jerry had lived in hope of winning and holding her love some day. She had never permitted herself even to say that she loved him, though he had felt more and more of late that it was only her stubborn pride that held her back. Damn that O'Neil! Jerry immediately winced at the thought of a curse on a dead man, but the meanness that was Kevin O'Neil survived the death of his earthly body. In life he had kept Ellen from him, and now a greater chasm yawned between them. With Ellen denied him, little else mattered to Jerry.

He stood up. His strong face was drawn and the gentleness of his mouth and eyes was gone. In its place were the grim lines of anger that words can not express and a ruthless determination. The steel of Jerry Guard's soul showed in that moment.

"Sheriff Murdock," he said harshly, "this damn' foolishness has gone far enough. We've got to find the killer of Kevin O'Neil. If you'll take my pledge not to run away I'll ride with you and help you with all I can give."

Murdock's eyes narrowed and a tightening of his jaw answered the challenge in Guard's voice. "You'll do as I tell you, Jerry Guard; and that includes keeping your mouth shut. I'm the sheriff and you're a prisoner charged with murder."

Guard drew a deep breath. "All right. I'll take any means to get around you then, Sheriff Murdock, and I warn you that if I start anything you better not be in my way."

The sheriff's hand went back to his rear pocket. There was a sound of metal jingling, and as he moved quickly upon Jerry the handcuffs gleamed in the lamplight.

"Oh, don't!" cried Ellen. The plea escaped her almost involuntarily. The metallic ring of the links on the cuffs seemed to stab her to the heart. "Sheriff, you needn't do that!"

The sheriff grunted, but he addressed Guard. "Hold 'em up!"

Jerry was pale, and his eyes burned. His hands he kept firmly at his sides. "You better not, Murdock; I'm tellin' you, you better not."

"Hold 'em up!" demanded the sheriff.

There came the creak of a door—and a voice. "Hold 'em up yourself, Sheriff, and see how you like it." In the front room entrance stood Dobe Kane, and in his hand was a six-gun that pointed unwaveringly at Sheriff Murdock.

No one in the ranch kitchen was more surprised than Jerry Guard. Sheriff Murdock was not; under his breath as he raised his hands he cursed himself for a fool. He knew too well that a killer would hardly walk into the house this way without an ace up his sleeve. But his chagrin was quickly concealed. He glared through narrowed eyes at Dobe Kane and spoke with bitter rancor.

"You're startin' something you'll never finish, fella. I'm giving you plain warning. Put up that gun and keep out of this."

"You're a little slow of understandin',

Sheriff," grinned Kane. "I ain't bluffin'. You're a good guy in your own way, but you're in our way right now. Jerry, take the gent's gun before he hurts anybody."

Jerry hesitated, but he advanced with a thin-lipped smile and removed the officer's gun from its holster. "I ain't keepin' this, Murdock." He opened the weapon and jacked out the cartridges, which he thrust in his pocket, immediately returning the gun to its place. "I imagine you won't try to load that thing until we've gone. We got some important business to attend to."

The sheriff seemed to be arriving at a decision of some moment. An air of conciliation replaced the anger that had seized him at first, and he resigned himself to an unavoidable if unpleasant situation.

"Listen here," he said, "there's no use us going off half cocked. I ain't at all sure who shot Kevin O'Neil. You know I was only doin' my duty, Jerry Guard; you'd do the same yourself."

"Which helps us not a bit," Kane answered breezily. "Besides, you're obstructin' the course of justice."

"What?"

"Exactly that. I ain't all sure yet what's been goin' on here; but I heard enough. Leave it to Jerry and me, Sheriff, and when it's all over you'll thank us."

MURDOCK found his mood of peace wilting under the cowboy's cheerful sarcasm, so he ignored him. He addressed himself to Jerry again. "Let's talk this over and get the straight of it," he said. "I'm a reasonable man, and if you can show me—"

"Sorry, Sheriff," Jerry interrupted curtly, "we have no time for talk. You had your chance a minute ago, and turned it down. I'm going to run this thing my own way." He walked to the table and halted, looking down at Ellen. She returned his scrutiny as she had followed the surprising events of the past few moments, a touch of color in her cheeks again, the gleam of suspense in her eyes, yet self-composed, silent.

Jerry could read nothing in her eyes. The smart that still lay on his heart cried out for the balm of her faith. She had none to offer, it seemed. He could endure her calm-eyed denial of love; had endured it long, in fact; but this forthright disbelief was too much. He steeled himself, enclosed the living wound within him in a shield of grim purposefulness. Jerry Guard was one of those men who find expression in action; men of thought, whose thought becomes intolerable unless translated into accomplishment. Such a case was this. Time enough yet to be sorry for himself; this night there was much to do.

"I'm going," he said. "I'll be back—some time."

Her voice was low. "Are you saying good-by?"

"Ellen!" he cried despite himself. Then curtly, "I don't know how, but I hope to bring the murderer of your uncle with me when I come here again."

"Good luck then, Jerry."

Suddenly and unaccountably her eyes were filmed with tears. She rose quickly and turned away, and halted again to stand erect and stare with unseeing gaze through a window into the darkness beyond. Her slender figure was proud, and yet somehow tragic; a figure of denial.

Jerry swung about and his face was harsh. "Dobe, where's your horse?" he asked.

"'Longside the barn."

"Give me that gun. Go get him and see that mine's outside."

The cowboy handed Guard the six-gun and crossed the room.

The sheriff watched him closely. Jerry felt a creeping suspicion at the air of suspense that was on the officer. Kane reached the door, turned the knob—and recoiled from the man who filled the abruptly opened entrance. He was a light-haired young rider whose boyish eyes gleamed with appreciation of the drama he created. In his hand was an extended gun and on his vest was a nickeled deputy's badge.

"Don't move, feller," he commanded, concentrating his attention on Jerry Guard. Jerry froze, his own gun useless. He might have swung about and fired, but in all likelihood he would be killed for his pains.

Murdock moved quickly and took the gun from Jerry's unresisting hand. He grinned, but with little humor. "I been waitin' for Ernie to turn up. I sent him to get you, and I knew he'd hotfoot over when he found you gone. We'll be able to settle that question of who's sheriff around here now."

The deputy entered the kitchen and closed the door, sliding his gun into the holster. Murdock handed him the confiscated weapon. "Get over there, both of you," he ordered Jerry and Kane, making them stand before the cupboard against the inner wall of the room. He had his own gun out, and was plugging cartridges into the cylinder. "We'll proceed with business now."

His first move, when he restored the loaded six-gun to his holster, was to yank out the handcuffs a second time. "Give me your pair," he demanded of the deputy. Then with the two sets he advanced on his prisoners.

ELLEN had been standing immobile beside a half opened closet door. Her eyes were gleaming suddenly with something other than tears. At the click of the handcuffs as they snapped about Jerry Guard's wrists she winced, but she caught her breath, looked into the closet beside her, and snatched at something hanging on the inside of the door. No one noticed her, and she glided across the room with her hands behind her back.

Ernie, the deputy, was abruptly dumbfounded to feel the pressure of a gun barrel in the neighborhood of his floating ribs, and to hear Ellen's harsh whisper in his ear.

"Don't you move. I'll kill you if you do."

Ernie took one glance, and the sight of a slim thumb holding back the hammer of the big .45 that had been Kevin O'Neil's reduced him to complete obedience. He allowed her to take from him both the gun in his hand and the one in his holster without saying a word. And then the two across the room caught the full significance of this byplay and simultaneously threw themselves on the sheriff. Murdock, intent on his task, was overwhelmed, disarmed, and backed against the cupboard himself before he could collect sufficient thought for speech.

"Now," cried Dobe Kane, "the voice of the people shall prevail! Also *sic semper tyrannus!*" He stood in the center of the floor waving the sheriff's gun, with a grin of exultation on his face. From his wrist dangled a handcuff which had been only half applied.

"Unlock this!" demanded Guard, standing before the sheriff.

Murdock cursed, but he complied. Jerry's voice was icy and dangerous. Murdock loosened each cuff, and Jerry snatched from his hand both that instrument and the bunch of keys. Then he darted across the room to Ellen, who stood as one frozen beside the deputy.

Jerry took the guns from her hands. "Ellen," he said, "this is different than I dared look for."

"Ellen O'Neil!" snapped Murdock, "are you siding with the man who has the blood of your uncle on his hands?"

She caught her breath and swayed, just the least bit, but Jerry's arm went out and offered her its support.

"Damn you, Murdock," he grated, "don't say that again!"

"Go!" said Ellen. "Go—please!" She moved away from Jerry, and suddenly crossed to the front room door and passed through into the darkness where lay Kevin O'Neil.

SIDE by side Jerry Guard and Dobe galloped through the night. The stars filled the heavens with an austere magnificence and gave to the world a faint glow which made the road just discernible as they went. Later the full moon would rise and the whole countryside would be revealed in its pallid light.

They did not talk. Time was too precious yet. They expected no immediate pursuit, for Dobe had hazed the three horses out of the barn and turned them into the pasture, where they would surely evade capture by men on foot for a considerable time. The mounts of the sheriff and his deputy they had turned loose on the road, knowing well that the animals would head for home. The officers would not interrupt them for an hour or more yet, and meantime there was much to do.

They turned in the home gate at last, and swinging off the horses, tied them to the porch railing. Jerry halted suddenly in the entrance when he found the door wide open.

"Go ahead, Jerry," assured Kane, "that only goes to show the lack of proper rearin' in the average deputy. Our friend Ernie don't know enough to close the door behind him."

Inside a light revealed everything untouched. The supper dishes were still on the table. Kane chuckled dryly as the glow of the lamp fell on the remains of the meal. "Looks like we got to leave things in disgraceful shape. We oughta at least brought Ernie along with us to do the dishes."

"God knows when they'll be done now," said Jerry. "Make up a pack of grub in a tarp. There's a couple of canteens in the cellar, I think; fill them up. I'm gettin' some blankets." He held a match to the wick of a second lamp and carried it into an adjoining room.

"Get our rifles and drag out all the ammunition you can find," Dobe called after him.

"I will," came the reply.

"And—say, Jerry!"

"Yes?"

"Ain't there a box of dynamite out in the barn?"

There was a momentary silence. Then, "Hey, for —— sakes, fella, what d'you think this is—the Hole-in-the-Wall gang?"

Dobe chuckled softly, and went on with his work.

To Jerry, busy in the bedroom, came the warming thought that he was mighty lucky to have Dobe Kane around in a time like this. Not one question had Dobe asked, nor had he given a word of explanation for his own actions. Merely that he had done them seemed sufficient reason; they were the things a right sort of fella always did.

Reflections of a more sober cast succeeded those thoughts. Jerry saw how deeply he was involved in the killing; and when Ellen could entertain a suspicion of his guilt, it was unlikely that Dobe Kane would absolve him without some speculation to that end. And if the incredible eventuality should occur in which the crime would be fastened on him, then Dobe stood to sacrifice his freedom for his friend—perhaps his life.

WHEN Jerry returned to the kitchen Kane was piling the food supplies on two tarpaulins in the center of the floor. Flour, bacon, beans, coffee: there was enough for ten days at least in the packs.

"Dobe," Jerry said soberly, "this promises to be a damn' serious matter."

"Unless we catch the fella what done it ourselves."

"Yes—unless."

Kane nodded without interrupting his labors.

"When I've got this stuff cached in a safe place," continued Jerry, "I'm doing some scouting. I got an idea that the guilty party is going to give himself dead away—to anybody lookin' out for signs. This country ain't so jam full of people that a man can get lost in the crowd. That fella's going to stand out like a sore thumb."

"Yeah—on a dark night," Dobe commented dryly.

"Well, some eyes can see in the dark."

"Bats and hoot owls can—for all the good it does us," went on Kane. "Listen here, Jerry—" he hesitated thoughtfully. "You know, personally, I ain't exactly feverish with indignation ag'in this hombre anyway. What if he did give the old man his ticket to hell? They been waitin' for him there a long time. Lots of fellas has done as much and got medals pinned on 'em for it."

Jerry smiled. "Might be, Dobe. But not many fellas got medals for shootin' down an unarmed man."

That silenced the cowboy. It seemed to be an aspect of the case he had not considered. A frown of deep thought appeared on his forehead as he completed his task with efficient hands.

They were soon ready. As he blew out the small lamp and Dobe stood with hand cupped over the mantel of the other, Jerry felt a strange pang of sadness at leaving the place that was home. It was not an ornate or luxurious house, but it was his own; he had built it, had earned the money that went into it. He dared not dwell on the possibility that he might never again walk into its doors a free man. As he went out he made plans for its protection, and for the care of his beef herd; he would ask Tom Bailey, his neighbor and friend, to take over the necessary duties of the ranch while he was gone.

Soon they passed out through the gate, their bedding and grub behind them on the saddles. They wore their gun belts now, and in their saddle boots nestled two .30-30 Winchesters. Dobe trailed after Jerry with a whistle on his lips and with never a question as to their destination.

The moon had crept over the horizon, and it glinted on an irrigation ditch in the bottom land. Elsewhere the country spread out in the contrasting shadows of hills and shallow water courses. They left the road and followed a trail scarcely visible in the dimness. It led to the foothills, the maze of cañon and sharp ridges that merged into the great ranges, pale and lovely in the far-off night. There was refuge.

III

IT WAS full midnight, and the only light that showed on the short main street of the little cowtown glowed in the windows of Sam Benfield's general store. The good people of Campbell retired early, and only that fact kept them from staring in surprise at this sign of extraordinary industry in the genial Sam. Old Benfield, to be sure, called it a day no earlier than he had to; but, good business man that he was, he usually saved on the overhead by closing shop and spending the shank of the evening at Hank Johnson's—possibly to his further profit, for Hank's Elite Saloon and Pool Parlor was often the scene of a stiff game.

Now he busied himself over a dog-eared account book that lay before him on the counter. By sundry sounds that came from him an observer might suspect that these were unaccustomed labors, and that the results of his calculations frequently gave him surprise.

Abruptly they ceased. He did not raise his eyes immediately from the page before him, but he laid down the stub of a pencil and frowned in thought. He rose, and walked to the door, a big portly figure of a man, grizzled of mustache and gray of hair, his brown eyes full of tolerant humor, his cheeks touched with the red of comfortable living. He put out the lights in the front of the store. After this he went outside, stood a moment in silent study of the sleeping town; and then strode to the corner of the frame building.

"That you, Jerry?" he whispered hoarsely into the darkness.

Young Guard appeared before him. "I'm darn' glad you were up, Sam," he said with heartfelt sincerity. "I had to see you, and I'd sure have to knock your house down to wake you if you were in bed."

Sam explained. "I had some work to do. It was very pressin', so I stayed up."

"Work?" Jerry chuckled softly as he followed the storekeeper inside.

"Sure!" Sam retorted. "Why, I been goin' to get at it for the past nine or ten year!"

Jerry laughed outright, and seated himself on an upended box. "You were waitin' for me," he said. "You figured I'd come here first thing, didn't you?"

"Wa-al, I had to get them accounts figgered some time. Besides, Murdock come in a couple of hours ago, and say—" he grinned—"was that feller fit to be tied! I hung around and learnt all about O'Neil's cashin' in, and how you jumped Murdock and lit out; so I thought I'd wait up. And when I heard pebbles rattlin' on the window I didn't need no dream book to figure 'em out."

Jerry smiled at the old man, and there was deep gratitude and affection in the smile. Old Benfield had been a friend of Jerry's father. He had counseled Jerry through his parentless youth; had welcomed him back each time he returned from the wanderings of early manhood; and had aided him to set up for himself on the little ranch that only now was beginning to show signs of prosperity.

"Sam," said Jerry, "I'm in a bad jam. But I got a couple of ideas as to how I'm goin' to get out of it. Murdock thinks I killed O'Neil. He's going to tear all over the country lookin' for me, and the jasper that done the job may be headin' south and half way to the border tomorrow."

"I think I got all the details," reflected old Sam, "but they don't make sense nohow. What d'you plan doin'?"

"Little worth talking about. But tell me somethin'—was Ellen O'Neil here today?"

"She was. She drove in the buckboard and loaded up with grub and things."

"Uh-huh. And Manuel, did you see him when he hit town this afternoon?"

"Yeh. He had a load o' wood, and he pulled up in front of Murdock's office and went in. I was lookin' out the door, and I wondered what was up."

JERRY reflected on this. How come that Mex went straight to the sheriff? Ellen's note said he had just been driving by, and that she had told him nothing. But clearly he knew something. Mexicans were discreetly blind to many things in that country, and no mere suspicion would send him to a sheriff, a variety of officer the swarthy brother left severely alone. Almost any definite information should tend to exonerate Jerry, yet Murdock had seemed quietly convinced of his guilt.

"You got any idea of what Manuel told the sheriff?" Jerry asked.

"No, I ain't," Sam replied sadly. "He come in here later on—he's got his nerve with him, that greaser! Well, he come in and bought some things, and I tried to inveigle him into talk. I asks him what's doin'. He just grins sorta eager like and says, "Nothing, señor.'

" 'How's business these days?' says I.

" 'Very bad,' says he, and goes on at great length, tellin' about the wood he cut up today and how hard he worked at it, and what little he'll collect on it. He was up on Jensen's place, he said."

"Jensen?" exclaimed Guard.

"Yeh," Sam answered, curious.

"Say, Sam; Jensen was bogged down in debt, and you know O'Neil held a mortgage on all his stock. D'you imagine—?"

"Nothin' doin'," Sam said gruffly. "Fool idea!" Yet it seemed to take hold. The big blond rancher was in dire straits, as every one knew, and he was a silent passionate man with none of the self-control Jerry had practiced in his dealings with O'Neil.

"I've got to get hold of Manuel and talk turkey to him," Jerry said. "He probably will know if Jensen was off his place this afternoon. I ain't wishin' any more hard luck on that poor Swede, but I got no choice between my neck and his."

"Duck!" exclaimed Benfield suddenly. "Git behind that counter. Somebody's comin'."

JERRY made a flying dive for the end of the counter, but when he swung down to get under its shelter he collided forcefully with a long packing case that filled the space. He heard the street door open; Sam had a bell arrangement on it that announced each customer with a loud jingling. There was not even time to scramble farther down the length of the counter where he could find room. Jerry froze where he was, behind a glass case that reared on top of the board, a combined display and stock of needles and thread. With only the single dim light in the rear of the store it concealed him with fair safety, and he breathed easier.

His interest was aroused to the keenest pitch when he saw who the customer was. Old Sam stood receiving him dubiously in the center of the floor. "You're kinda late, Manuel," he said. "I was just closin' up."

The Mexican, a smallish figure of a man with a stringy mustache and gleaming black eyes, apologized profusely. "Oh, Señor Benfield; my woman, she give me hell for bring her the wrong thing. I go all night to the *cantina;* think she forget. She still up waiting. She break dishes on me, she shout, she curse if I go in. Tomorrow I beat her, you bet; but if I must do tonight, I get arrested sure for so much noise we make."

Old Sam chuckled dryly. His glance darted to the case behind which Jerry watched them. Jerry waited, content to remain unseen. This was no place for his interview with Manuel; it was entirely too dangerous for all concerned. It would leave him at Manuel's dubious mercy.

"Well, what's wrong?" demanded Sam.

"Thees thread," said Manuel, holding out a twisted paper bag. "She wan' nomber sixty; not thees one."

Jerry felt a momentary panic; not of bodily fear, but for the security of his plans. He was behind the thread case. He must not be discovered in old Sam's store! He stepped backward, to retire farther in the shadows; but the move was of doubtful success, for he collided with a tin box of crackers on a shelf, and with what seemed a deafening crash the box dumped itself on the floor.

"Rats!" he heard Sam exclaim. "Damn them critters!"

Manuel looked around, startled, but the shadows were thick. What he could see in the dark corner Jerry could not guess. The wood-cutter turned and addressed himself to Sam again with suppressed eagerness.

"You geeve me thees thread, señor; an' I go?"

Old Sam gave him the full benefit of his concentrated glare for a moment, then he grunted. "Well—all right. And say, Manuel; that lamp looks like it's smokin'. Turn 'er down like a good feller." Sam moved toward the case on the counter and jerked a thumb toward the lamp on a shelf in the rear.

Manuel shuffled off, and Sam was behind the counter with astonishing quickness. He said nothing to Jerry as he opened the case. He was out again, and waiting with the spool of thread, when the Mexican turned about and left the lamp.

"She's no smoke, Señor Sam," he said with gleaming teeth. "Thees dark make one see many things which are not—*no es?*"

"You bet," Sam agreed promptly. "If a feller wants to remain a good hombre they's lots of things he sees that he don't pay any attention to."

"Es verdad!" assured Manuel.

"Yeh. You run along now and make up with your woman. I'm closin' up."

"Good night, Señor Sam. An' *muchas gracias!*" The Mexican was gone.

OLD Sam remained at his door for some minutes before he spoke. At length he turned away. "He's goin' home all right, I guess. But I'd like to know what's on that hombre's mind."

Jerry emerged from his shelter. "I sure didn't want to talk to him here. But I thought I was cornered for a while."

"Yeh, I figgered you was layin' low."

"Well, he can wait. Now I'm makin' tracks, Sam; but first I want to ask you a favor. It's the chief reason I come."

"Shoot, son."

"I want to talk to Ellen O'Neil. With the crowd likely hangin' around the house just now, I daren't call on her. But you can get word that I'll be at Red Mesa Spring tomorrow. Make it three o'clock. I just got to talk to her before I can plan to do anything."

"Uh-huh," grunted Sam, frowning thoughtfully while he rubbed his chin. "I guess we can fix that. Think she'll risk quittin' the bunch? I hear Mrs. Murphy and Mrs. Coleman went out to stay with her tonight."

"Glad to hear that," said Jerry. "But I think she'll be there just the same."

Sam glanced at him. Then a slow warm smile lighted the face of the old-timer. "I got an idee she will too, Jerry. I'm pullin' for you, boy. Lookee here." He led the way to a rear corner of the store, where he lifted the lid of a small bin and pointed to its contents. "I'm savin' it, Jerry."

Guard stared, puzzled. All he saw was a bin full of ordinary polished rice. He looked into old Sam's face. "What's 'at for?"

Sam chuckled. Then he rumbled, and guffawed outright. He drew close and whispered in Jerry's mystified ear. "Y'know what Ellen come in town fer today?"

"Grub or something, you said?"

"Hell no! That was only an excuse. She got a package by express. Linens—don't half know what all. I seen the label on it myself, addressed to her personal from Chicago."

"Linens?" repeated Jerry. He racked his brains to find some unusual significance in the purchase of dry goods by Ellen O'Neil.

Old Sam stared at him, and then shook his head. "Boy, you're plumb hopeless. Just you figger that out for yourself."

Jerry gave up. He shrugged his shoulders, abashed by his density, and turned away. And for the second time on that eventful night he went into sudden hiding—again at the powerful compulsion of Benfield, who shoved him into a shadowed corner with a hissed warning.

Sam moved swiftly to the entrance of the store. There he gave an exclamation of surprise and held the door open. Manuel appeared there, wide eyed and his swarthy skin somewhat pale. He was not alone. Behind him, prompting him with the uncomfortable muzzle of a .45, entered Dobe Kane.

JERRY emerged from his cover in dismay. "My Gawd, Dobe," he protested, "ain't we got enough to do without herdin' Manuel too!"

"Manuel needed herdin'," Dobe replied with a narrow glance at the quailing Mexican. "He was strayin' plumb off his range."

"How'd you turn up?" demanded Benfield.

"Me an' Jerry come in together. I rode herd outside. When this hombre come along he done it so quiet that I just had time to get under cover myself. I listened, and when he left I trailed him on general principles. He took his foot in his hand and hit the dust for the sheriff's office."

"Sheriff's office!" exclaimed Jerry. "Is anybody there?"

"Ernie, I guess."

"Manuel!" Jerry said harshly. "What you been up to?"

"Señor Jerry!" quavered the shrinking Mexican. "I no do nothing. I am go right home then."

"You're gettin' too damn' popular with the sheriff to suit me," went on Guard. "Now you come across—what's the answer?"

"*Madre d'Dios!*" pleaded the overwrought prisoner. He turned to Benfield. "Señor Sam, you know I live jus' by the *juzgado*. I must go near to be home. Thees hombre stop me with his gun."

"How about that, Sam?" Jerry asked.

"Wa-al, he's tellin' the truth, all right. He would have to go past the jail to go home. Where 'd you stop him, Dobe?"

Dobe smiled in dry fashion, looking at the Mexican. "I didn't wait till he was in the office. I just made up my mind while it looked like he was on the way."

Manuel watched the other two eagerly, and it was plain that his alibi had shaken Dobe's story. Dobe's suspicions might be correct, but how could one call Manuel a liar in the face of so natural an explanation?

"I don't know," sighed Guard. "I ain't a mind reader. I guess we can let that slide a while anyway. However, this is as good as any time to get the straight of a couple of other things. Manuel," he asked, "you were at Jensen's all day today, weren't you?"

"*Si, señor!*"

"Was Jensen home this afternoon?"

The eager light in the Mexican's eyes faded. He seemed to draw within himself, and there was a touch of sullenness in his voice. "I don' know what he do, Señor Jerry."

"Hombre, listen here a minute." Dobe Kane drew near, to stare directly into the Mexican's face. He spoke slowly, but with chilling threat in his voice. "We ain't got no time to waste playin' tag with you. We're on the long ride, fella, and I'd kill a man that got in my way. And where I come from, killin' a greaser ain't even a jail offense. Now *talk!*"

Manuel Ortega must have come from that same part of the country, for he shivered and shrank from Dobe while his gaze hung in fascinated fear on his face. "*Sangre d'Christi!*" he said, and it was a prayer instead of an oath. Then he spoke volubly. "I tell. Sure I tell. That Jensen he go 'way today. I see him from where I work; he saddle his horse two hour after dinner and no come back for two hour more."

"Which way did he ride?" demanded Guard.

"He ride like he go to town."

JERRY and Sam exchanged glances, sober and troubled. There was enough here to give them serious thought, and yet not enough to utter the accusation that sprang from it. Jensen was well esteemed, even if not particularly liked. They would be sorry for him as a victim of overwhelming circumstances if he were proved guilty in this killing. In riding "like he go to town," Jensen was headed for the O'Neil ranch.

"I got another idea buzzin' around, Manuel," Jerry continued. "I been wonderin' how come you called on the sheriff when you came to town this afternoon. What was it you told him?"

That the Mexican regretted his action seemed plain. "Señor Jerry, I like the Mees O'Neil," he said plaintively. "She was in trouble today. She no tell me, an' I no ask what. I say only I give you note. I cannot read, so I still don' know what is wrong. I look back after I leave you. You no go soon. All the way home I theenk, theenk, what is wrong. Mees O'Neil was so trouble, so *dolorosa*. When I am in town I theenk maybe she ask you for help, maybe to ride for doctor or sheriff. I get *muy* frightened when I no see you gallop by me. Then I tell the Sheriff Murdock; he is a good man, an' know what to do always."

Jerry Guard pondered over this explanation, and while he might curse the fellow for a blundering fool, still it had an element of appeal. The swarthy brother, when confronted by a situation which baffles him, yet which does not involve him in the law, is very likely to carry his problem in naive fashion to the respected—even when hated—American. This too was natural, and though it simplified matters, it did so by cutting off several prized leads in this maze of mystery.

Jerry looked at Sam and Dobe. The two were watching him, leaving to him the task of unraveling the threads. "Gosh," he said, "the clearer this gets, the less we got to go on. Well— Manuel, one thing more. Did you tell Murdock about the note?"

"No. Señor Jerry, I go to help Mees O'Neil when I speak to the sheriff. But I am still not wish to get into trouble. What the note says I do not know—so what use to speak of it?"

Jerry smiled in spite of himself. Canny fellow! And as characteristic an act in its way as was the impulse to tell Murdock his fears for Ellen O'Neil. There was little profit to be had here.

"All right, Manuel," he conceded, "I guess you meant well, even if you did succeed in raising hell all around."

"*Si, señor,*" beamed the grateful Manuel. He fairly basked in the forgiveness of Guard.

"We'll go along now, Sam," Jerry said. "Don't forget to—"

"Jerry, old hoss," Dobe interrupted quickly, "whatever it is, trust Sam not to forget it. Be done talkin'. Let's go."

A little startled, but with no objection, Jerry grinned a farewell to Benfield and went out. Dobe held the door open for him, and called back to the storekeeper. "Sam, s'pose you entertain friend Manuel a while until we get a fair start. He's liable to get himself into trouble again like the kind hearted cuss he is."

"Shore—shore," said old Sam with a warning look at the Mexican. "You fellas git goin'. Manuel and me'll git along fine."

Later, as Jerry and Dobe lay in their blankets on a brush-grown shelf above a high cañon, smoking their last cigaret, Jerry recalled that moment.

"Dobe," he said curiously, "how come you spoke up so abrupt as we were leavin' Benfield's tonight?"

"Yeah—an' how come I suggested Sam close herd that spig a while? That it?"

"Yes.

"Well," said Dobe, crushing the stub of his cigaret in the earth at his side, "when that ranny starts tellin' the truth I'm gonna give up punchin' cows and join a tribe of Digger Injuns." He snuggled down into his blankets. "I got a lot of sleep comin' to me now, and I'm goin' to collect. G'night!"

IV

RED MESA SPRING blessed a little strip of earth with its precious waters at the foot of a great imminence that overlooked all the valley like a throne of the gods. The mesa towered above the verdant growth clustering about the spring, but even in that lower site one could sit and gaze for miles uncounted across the land. It was an ideal place for a rendezvous of danger, and Jerry Guard reclined with his back against a cottonwood, smoking a cigaret with a sense of satisfaction that was only heightened by his impatience to see Ellen.

It was past the hour of three, but Jerry knew well that the girl might have difficulty in evading the sympathetic attention of her friends—perhaps even the suspicious surveillance of Sheriff Murdock. After what she had done the evening before, Jerry thought with an inward chuckle, the sheriff couldn't be blamed for trying almost anything. Jerry did not consider for a moment that Ellen would be held accountable in any way for her act. Women still were regarded in that man's country as creatures somehow apart, and as the niece of the slain man she merited even further leeway in what she chose to do.

Jerry looked at his watch again, and his gaze traveled carefully over the country through which Ellen would likely come riding. It was broken up with washes and hills and an occasional grove of trees. No sign of her could he find, and he rose and stretched his legs with the beginnings of uneasiness forming within him. Near by the big bay looked up from her grazing and stared inquiringly.

Time passed, and the sun swung far in its journey, and still Ellen did not come. Jerry was not deeply concerned. He knew without question that old Sam Benfield had conveyed his message to her by hook or by crook, and he felt that whatever the reason for her delay, it was sufficient without being alarming. But when a man is uncertain of the tenure of his freedom, of his life, the logic of his mind is cold consolation for the impatience of his heart.

It was, therefore, with considerable suppressed excitement that he perceived a rider making boldly across country for the spring. Jerry saw him top a hill and disappear in a depression; saw him again—and then recognized the horse. His heart sank. It was Dobe Kane.

Many minutes later Dobe rode up. He smiled slowly at Jerry's lack of interest in his arrival. The young rancher was hacking aimlessly at a stick, his back once more against the cottonwood.

"Didn't she come yet, Jerry?" the rider asked.

"No."

"Well, mebbe you'll have to go to her yourself. Murdock can make himself as close as the memory of a skunk, which for all his good points he can occasionally resemble right smart."

"Yeah. He means well—damn his hide!"

Dobe dismounted and unsaddled the horse, carefully examining his back. "You done some traveling in the last twenty-four hours, boy," he said. "Come and I'll tie you up where the grass is long and sweet."

THE horse tethered, Dobe returned and rolled a cigaret. "Well, I been doin' a little sleuthin', and transactin' some business on the side. First I called on Tom Bailey. He was right indignant about this jam you're in, and he agreed to have his riders look after your stuff like it was his own. Wouldn't agree to accept a cent for it."

"That's like Tom," said Jerry, warmed by this evidence of friendship.

"Next I went up to see Jensen. The poor Swede is half scared—and half crazy to fight the whole county. Some kindhearted feller told him he's gonna be arrested for this killin'. He's been workin' himself 'most to death on that quarter of his, and he can't hope for bail if he's arrested. I really think that the possible hangin' never even occurs to him—but he goes right off his bat at the thought of abandonin' his quarter and sittin' idle in jail while all his work goes to pot."

"That bird is halfwitted anyway, workin' the quarter he's on," said Jerry. "But he has guts, and if I get out of this, and the killer turns out to be somebody else, I'm sure going to give him a hand. He's earned it. What did he have to say?"

"He denied bein' off his place one minute yesterday."

"Huh. That so? Somebody's lyin' there."

"You can take your choice," Dobe replied dryly. "Jensen says that Manuel was off the place for more than an hour. Claims he rode one of his team bareback."

"That don't sound right to me," objected Jerry. "Manuel came by yesterday afternoon with a full load on his wagon. He hardly would have loaded up if he laid down on the job. And after all, Jensen has a reason to say just that."

"Sure. So have we. What say you and me testify we went up that way together and saw both Manuel and Jensen washin' the stains of crime off their hands?"

"You ole black-hearted liar!" exclaimed Guard. But he smiled again, and there was affection in his voice. He rose and stretched. "Well, no use me waitin' around here any longer. It's gettin' late. Pretty soon it's going to be dark, and I think I can pussyfoot around O'Neil's till I find Ellen without raisin' the law."

"Hell, I wasn't talkin' serious, Jerry!" protested Dobe. "That'd be a fool thing to do!"

"Well, I shouldn't have killed O'Neil in the first place," Jerry drawled lazily. Dobe grinned and shrugged his shoulders, and Jerry went for his horse to saddle him for the ride.

"You amble back to the hide-out," went Jerry's parting instructions to Dobe Kane, "and have something to eat for me when I come in. I may be late, but if I'm not in by midnight, you better go down to Campbell and see Sam Benfield. I'll get in touch with him if anything goes wrong."

"Don't keep me waitin'," Kane called after him. "I gets plumb riled when anybody lets my grub get cold."

JERRY GUARD did not hurry, for the bay had done a grueling amount of work since the night before, and he wished to spare her. Besides he did not want to approach the ranch-house until nightfall. He waited in a little group of trees in the pasture while the last touch of blood red was blotted out in the western sky and the stars came out in their full cold radiance. Then he advanced on foot, after removing his spurs and loosening his .45 in its holster.

There were many lights in the ranch-house. Jerry surmised that old O'Neil had not been buried yet, and that the house was full of visitors and bustling women. A little thrill ran up his spine at the thought of the chance he was taking, but too much was at stake to delay any more. He had to go through with it.

No one seemed to be about the rear of the house, and he made his way almost to the door. There he halted and looked in a window. Ellen and the stout Mrs. Murphy crossed his field of vision, and he crept closer till he was under the sill.

The women were cleaning up after supper. The size of the pile of dishes gave him warning of the numbers he would encounter if he were discovered. The rooms in the front of the house must be jammed at that rate. He could hear the sound of many horses in the barn across the yard, and his eyes found the dim outlines of the buckboards left about.

The women were talking, but the window was closed and he could hear only an occasional word. Ellen was flushed of cheek from her work, weary of eye from the ordeal, but there seemed to be no great grief on her. She was slender with a youthful roundness of figure, full of lithe strength rather than thin, and her face even now, in so humble a setting, was beautiful in a fine wrought fashion. Over the black dress she had already devised she wore a clean white apron. The sight of her thrilled Jerry as he watched, and the danger he defied was spice to his joy.

Mrs. Murphy, beaming and motherly, collected a pile of dishes in her capable arms, and carried them out of the kitchen into another room. Ellen took advantage of the moment to sit down on a chair, and she allowed herself to lean back and relax with complete weariness. Alone now, she did not have to keep up her rôle of cool self-possession and polite sorrow. The work she had welcomed, for it enabled her to abandon her thoughts. But they came back full force each time she relaxed her vigilance, and now she brushed a hand across her face as if to scatter them and keep them from tormenting her more.

Outside Jerry was frantic. He tapped on the window with his fingers, but his caution made the signal inaudible to the girl. He pulled the gun from his belt and, holding the barrel near the glass, tapped again, sharply and clearly.

Ellen looked up, and stared wide eyed at the window. She gave no sign of alarm at sight of him, no exclamation of surprise. Instead she glanced at the door through which Mrs. Murphy had gone and then moved swiftly to Jerry's window. He helped her raise it.

"Ellen!" he cried softly. "Girl, I been near crazy! Did Sam Benfield tell you—?"

"I couldn't get away," she replied quickly. "But Jerry, you should never have come here! Sheriff Murdock is inside now. Only that he and his deputy are eating you surely would have been caught before you reached the house."

"I had to chance that," he assured her grimly. "You're the only one can set me right on this muddle. And besides—" he hesitated, looking at her.

"What, Jerry?"

"I just had to see you, Ellen," he said simply.

The girl did not reply. She glanced back in the room, thoughtful for a space; then spoke hurriedly. "Jerry, go down and wait for me at the spring. I'll take the crock and say I'm going for more butter. Go—quickly."

She moved away as the door inside was pushed open, and Jerry, without waiting to see who was coming, stepped back and hurried with cautious steps to the spring where the perishables were kept.

ELLEN came out of the night to him like something unreal, on soundless tread, her face a pale glow against the darkness of her hair. Jerry was seized with a mad desire to take her in his arms, to force her to submit to the love he felt by some prescient knowledge was hers. But sanity ruled, and he stood up before her quietly and gravely.

"Jerry, we must talk fast; I can't stay away for long. Tell me, what is it you want to know?"

"I won't ask what I most want to know, Ellen," he said. "I guess there are too many other things to find out first."

"Yes," she agreed, and he wondered from the calm tone if she really understood his meaning.

"Tell me just what you know about—your uncle's death."

"Very little. I came home late yesterday afternoon; I hurried to get my uncle's supper on time, because he was always impatient. The front door was open. I went in that way, wondering who left it so, and almost stumbled over his body just inside the door. He lay on his face, as though he had been shot as he came in. I was frightened; I didn't know what to do; and I even felt somehow guilty myself. You know—well, I did not love my uncle very much, Jerry; not as much as I should perhaps."

"We'll discuss that again, girl."

"You were near, Jerry," she went on. "I had always trusted you. I have been sorry for the hate between you and my uncle. I tried to make him see otherwise. You asked me to marry you once. He heard of it and was purple with rage."

"Yes—he stood to lose a housekeeper who worked for him without a cent in pay!"

"Jerry—don't. He's dead now—"

"All right. Go ahead, Ellen."

"Well, the first thought that came to me was to send for you. But even while I wrote that note there came a second."

The girl paused until Jerry urged her to continue.

"Jerry," she said, "I have trusted you and I still do. But I could not trust your temper. You were always sentitive, proud;

and you never thought to avoid a fight. I knew what cause my uncle could give you for anger—even the anger that—"

"Say it, Ellen."

"That would make you kill him."

"Yes." His voice was low. He tried to keep his feelings out of it, but it was stricken, suffering.

Ellen was not deaf to his pain. "Oh, Jerry," she cried softly, "don't you see? I sent for you to ask you—just to ask you. Whatever you told me I would believe."

"Ellen!" There was a little of awe in his voice, like one blind who has been made to see, like the parched wanderer who finds suddenly before him the lost green land of succor and comfort. He stepped closer and tried to read her eyes in the darkness. Then his arms went about her. "Ellen, Ellen, tell me—" he pleaded.

"Jerry—oh, please!" A shudder ran through her body and for a brief second she allowed him to hold her close. But she put her hands on his breast and pushed him gently. "We—I can't, Jerry. Not now. Oh, why must I make you suffer so! But there are so many things to do, Jerry. You have your very life to guard. You mustn't let this blind you, weaken you. You have a stern duty to perform."

He let his arms drop and stepped back, numb of heart. No thought came to him—only the emptiness of his arms that had held her once a second before, an eternity gone.

She was before him, her hand on his shoulder. "Jerry," she said quietly, "I want to hear you say it. Tell me—!"

"That—your uncle?" he asked dumbly.

"Yes."

"I did not kill your uncle," he stated slowly.

"Then I believe you—completely," she told him.

Jerry gathered himself and forced his brain to sensibility again. Her words helped. They were full of a faith that had no reservation; they were spoken not in passion but calmly, with reason sitting in judgment. It was a faith that could be relied on, that he would have to merit.

"I'm glad, Ellen," he said simply. "If I didn't have your belief in me I couldn't go on, that's all."

"Jerry, don't exaggerate—" she began calmly. But his hand was over her mouth.

"Ellen, I understand what you're drivin' at when you say things like that—but don't do it. You can help me keep my head all right, but I can't listen to you denyin' the biggest thing in my life even for that."

She caught her breath. "I'm sorry, Jerry. I think—I understand."

"I'm going now, Ellen."

"Yes—it's long past time. Good-by, Jerry."

"Good-by, girl."

But they both stood without moving. They had made their farewells brief, sensible; yet their eyes, glowing in the dark, belied them.

The silence between them grew and became something palpable, something that clung to them and let their strength flow away in a draining rush.

Then his arms were about her, swift, trembling. Her hands were on his breast, crushed limp by his embrace. Their lips found each other. They kissed, and the night and its terrors ceased to be.

Only for a brief instant; then apart they drew, and with a single word of farewell, Jerry was gone into the dark.

ELLEN found herself singing softly as she went about her work in the kitchen, later. Mrs. Murphy eyed her curiously once or twice, and Ellen found it necessary to caution herself with firmness.

"You been a long time gettin' a little butter," the portly matron finally commented. There was a subdued twinkle in the older woman's eye, and Ellen's heart skipped a beat as she wondered what her friend could have guessed. But then came reassurance; Mrs. Murphy was of the salt of the earth, and if she could have divined the joy that sang in Ellen's heart it was as safe as the secrets of the Sphinx.

Ellen went about the house a little later, among the subdued, awkward men who had come to pay a last respect to the lifeless clay in the front room. Even Kevin O'Neil had numbered a few friends among the many who knew him; and on this final pitiful occasion Ellen did not begrudge them to him. In her heart there was only forgiveness for a warped, crippled soul.

But when she passed through the dining room Ellen halted suddenly in her path and her face paled again with a cold premonition. Two or three men smoked stringy cigars in gloomy fashion on chairs about the wall. The table was empty—the table where she had left Sheriff Murdock and his deputy. The food was still on the board, unfinished, and the chairs were pushed back as though from a hurried exit. And nowhere else about the house had she seen the two.

In the kitchen Mrs. Murphy watched her closely when she entered. "Sheriff Murdock and his depity went out the back way a couple of minutes ago," she told Ellen with meaning.

"Oh!" the girl breathed. Then, "Where did they go?"

"I dunno. They was bucklin' on their guns as they went out." Mrs. Murphy was washing dishes, and she paused with her soapy hands out of the water. "You sit right down there and stop your rushin' around. I got a pot o' tea I ain't made a minute since, and you'll take a cup and rest yourself." She dried her hands and forced the girl into a chair. And as she poured the tea she said softly, "Dear, dear, I mind the time my Danny used to come courtin' me, God ha' mercy on him, with the law officers at his heels and him hardly with time to let me look in his eyes. But I knew my Dan better than any sheriff did, and I waited for him. He showed them too; he proved he was an honest man; and if he was alive today he'd be a rich cattleman with hundreds and hundreds of cows." She sighed. "It was hard, Ellen, before the cloud lifted—terrible hard, but my faith was justified." She smiled. "Now just you drink this tea and try to rest yourself."

Ellen was touched, and grateful, and she felt that she knew the kindly widow as she never had known her before. But the fear in her would not be still. She drank the tea, but it was tasteless. She sat watching the door through which the sheriff had gone buckling his gun belt as he went.

In time that door opened. And the large body of Sheriff Murdock filled the entrance. He paused, grinned slightly at sight of Ellen, and entered. There was a great content on him, and his eyes glowed with self-satisfaction.

"Well, we got him!" he announced.

"Got who?" demanded Mrs. Murphy.

Murdock chuckled. "Jerry Guard. He walked right into my arms."

"Ye're a brave man, Sheriff," admired the widow. "Was it the barrel of your gun you hit him with?"

Murdock glanced at her in dim astonishment. "Hit him? I didn't hit him. Ernie was right with me and our guns were in his ribs before he knew what happened."

"Where is he?" went on the widow grimly.

"Out in the harness room in the barn."

"Sheriff," spoke up Ellen.

She hesitated to continue then, for the sheriff had little gratitude for what she had done the previous night. But she continued bravely. "Will you take him in here instead of keeping him out in that place?"

Murdock's eyes narrowed as he surveyed her. "What's on your mind now, eh, Ellen? I can't have you interferin' with my duty twice, you know. You're a gal and likely to do foolish things, but I'd certainly not hesitate to arrest you if you even tried that again."

"Honest, Sheriff Murdock, I won't try to interfere," Ellen pleaded. She felt that she was humbling herself, but also that she must. "I promise."

Murdock scratched his head dubiously. "I dunno. I'd think out there'd be lots better than here, where he's likely to meet some people who wouldn't take kindly to what he done to your uncle."

"Murdock, you thick headed lummox!" indignantly cried Mrs. Murphy. "Will you put a curb on that tongue of yours? Go right out and get that boy and let us give him a decent meal, after him sleepin' out in the hills and feedin' himself nothin' but dry jerky no doubt. Ellen has given her promise, and I'd like to see the man that'd refuse it!"

Murdock retreated before the attack, and though he grumbled and was obviously unwilling, he went out the door under the glare of the formidable widow.

"I know how to handle 'em," she declared to Ellen with a grin of triumph. "My Danny, Lord ha' mercy on him, could tell you that!"

V

AND so Jerry Guard was brought into the O'Neil kitchen. His hands were clasped before him in the grip of the manacles, and his mouth was a thin line of silent fury. He glanced once at Ellen, and sat down grimly beside the table. Ernie, the deputy, entered with Murdock and his prisoner, but departed again on the whispered instructions of the sheriff.

For the first time in her self-reliant life

Ellen O'Neil felt herself weak to the point of despair. Always before trouble and hardship had found her more than able to meet them, head high and sustained by a silent pride that asked neither aid nor sympathy. But no weapon of her spirit was strong enough to meet this; her valiant soul went down beneath the forces of a tragedy greater than she had ever known.

"Jerry!" she whispered across the table. "Oh, Jerry, how can I— What are we going to do, Jerry? Tell me, speak to me, dear—!"

But Jerry was silent. He was afraid to speak, afraid even to look across the table at the stricken eyes of the woman he loved. Fight he could, fight even to the death for what he believed right; but a searing iron on his soul was the pain that Ellen bore.

"Sheriff!" Ellen turned breathlessly. "You *know* he didn't do it! He *couldn't!* Why do you hound him?"

Sheriff Murdock had undergone enough indignities in this case to make his official pride more than sensitive. But besides that the sheriff was an honest man. He was justly proud of his record in office, and the accusation in Ellen's plea, implying as it did callous indifference to the ends of justice, cut deeply.

"I never hounded anybody," he said slowly and with terrible sincerity. "For fifteen years I have arrested criminals in this county, and brought them to trial, usually with a confession. I don't try them. I don't sentence them to hang when they have killed. They write their own death warrants when they commit murder." His voice took on added intensity. "And this man here has committed murder, and by the oath of my office I shall do everything within my power to bring him to the death cell at Raeburn!"

There was a cry, a small little sound that measured the depths of suffering in a human soul; and Ellen O'Neil covered her eyes with her hands. Otherwise there was silence, thick and intense, so that the breathing of Jerry Guard sounded harsh and inhuman from where he sat with his head in his hands. Even the sheriff was appalled, and a wild sort of remorse for his words blanched his weathered face. He turned away, ashamed as he had never been before.

Mrs. Murphy gave him a look of scorn beyond words and dropped clumsily but tenderly to her knees beside Ellen. Crooning, she took the silent girl into her arms and rocked to and fro.

THERE came an interruption. The door was flung open abruptly, and the cool night air flowed in through the entrance. Sheriff Murdock turned, and almost cursed aloud at his deputy's zeal. For grinning wryly in the doorway stood Dobe Kane, and behind him, excited and triumphant, Ernie held a gun at the cowboy's back.

"I got him, Sheriff!" the deputy cried. "Gosh, what luck!"

Dobe walked into the room and gazed about him coolly. "If they's any reward on me, folks," he said, "I want to claim it all for myself. This half pint here simply showed me the way. I had to go up and poke him in the ribs to let him know I was here."

Ernie grinned uncomfortably, but as he sensed some emotional upheaval in his superior, he did not deny the allegation.

"You blasted fool!" said Jerry hotly. "Why didn't you stay where I told you? Or if you had to follow, why didn't you ride and keep ridin' when you saw they nabbed me?" This was all that was needed to fill Jerry's cup of bitterness to overflowing, this embroiling of his dearest friend in his own tragedy. Yet it gave him precious relief in anger and profanity which he did not mean.

"I ain't workin' for you any more, Jerry Guard," the cowboy told him coolly. "I quit tonight, a while ago. You and me are through."

This failed to penetrate in Jerry's consciousness for a moment of incredulous silence. Even when the portent of Dobe's words was clear beyond misunderstanding, he could not bring himself to believe it. It was—it was *impossible!*

"What—what d'you mean?" he demanded.

Dobe turned calmly to Sheriff Murdock. "Might as well unlock those bracelets on him, Sheriff," he suggested. "You'll need 'em for me, I guess."

It was the sheriff's turn to demand an explanation.

"Oh," Dobe replied disgustedly, "that feller couldn't kill a beef steer. Old O'Neil's been askin' for a bullet in his gizzard as long as I can remember. I had to do it myself!

Turn him loose, Sheriff—I'm the guy that killed Kevin O'Neil!"

THEY could not shake Dobe Kane's story. They tried hard enough; Jerry with aghast incredulity, Murdock with a suspicion that he was somehow being jobbed on the deal. Ellen sat frozen, watching the cowboy. Mrs. Murphy stood back, capable, alert, missing nothing.

The only wholly self-possessed person in the kitchen was Dobe Kane. He grinned insolently at them all, and his voice was caustic as he related his story of cool deliberate murder. Certainly he had killed O'Neil; why not, he was lookin' for it? Everybody knew the old man had bought himself a shotgun. No use tryin' to think it was for huntin'; it was a man killin' weapon, intended for either Jerry or Dobe.

"I quit work yesterday," went on the cowboy, "and walked over here. It ain't so far across country from our hay field."

"What did you come here for?" demanded the sheriff.

"I come to see Ellen," Dobe declared.

"Huh! Why?"

"None of your business, Murdock," was the insolent reply. "I'm tellin' this story. I walked in from the back, around the barn and corral. Nobody was in sight, so I went right in this door. Couldn't hear sound of any one in the house, and I walked through into the front room. Nobody there. I looked out the front door, and still seein' nobody, I came back to the kitchen and helped myself to some doughnuts in the cupboard, meanin' to wait a while."

Murdock whirled about. "Was there doughnuts in the cupboard yesterday?" he shot at Ellen.

"Yes, Sheriff—there nearly always is."

Murdock grunted sceptically as he returned to Kane. "Which you knew, eh, Kane? Little risk of bein' caught lyin' in that."

The cowboy smiled sardonically at Murdock and went on with his narrative. "I heard a horse whinny some time after. I know the sorrel that O'Neil usually rode, and I thought I knew that horse's voice. I edged into the front of the house to take a look through a window. As I pushed open the door to the front room O'Neil was just comin' into the house that way. Now he'd been talkin' about his new scatter gun. He didn't say anything, but he made a dive for his desk beside the door. I don't know what he went after—but if it was that gun I know what he'd do with it, findin' me wanderin' around in his house. I aimed to discourage him. I had my gun down my waistbelt and I used it prompt. It happens—well, my aim was bad. He fell down and didn't get up. I went away from there. That's all."

The sheriff's mouth formed a grim line. Somehow the proper satisfaction of apprehending a killer was lacking on this occasion. "You're makin' your own bed, Kane, and you'll have to lie on it. But I know that some way, somehow, you're lying."

"Why should I lie?" retorted the cowboy.

" 'Cause you're in cahoots with Guard!" bellowed the sheriff in sudden rage. "You're framin' me, by God, and I'll be damned if I'll listen to your shifty stories! You're under arrest for aidin' and abettin' in the escape of a prisoner!"

"Does a man swear his life away, Sheriff?" Dobe asked.

Jerry came to his feet and advanced on the cowboy, gaze intense as he studied his face. "Dobe Kane," he said slowly, ignoring Murdock, "are you doing this to save my neck at the cost of your own?"

A little of the calm of Dobe disappeared as he faced the gaze of young Guard, and on his face there came a look of bleakness. "No," he retorted, "I am not. I have my own reasons for surrendering. Better ones than saving your neck. You could swing high as Haman for all I care, Jerry Guard. There are—other reasons."

"For God's sake, Dobe, what's wrong?" begged Jerry. "I know well you didn't do this job. You couldn't—you were cuttin' hay all afternoon yesterday."

Dobe smiled sardonically. "Was I? You check up how much I done yet? Try it—and see how long I was cuttin' hay yesterday. Fella, I even saw you on the road and lay in the grass so's you wouldn't spot me across the field."

Jerry could think of no answer to that. Instead, he put out his steel bound hands in an unconscious gesture. They fell on Dobe's forearm and gripped him.

Then Dobe's face changed. It grew dark, and if malignant hate can burn in a man's eyes, the flame was in his. His arm drew back from Jerry's clutch. "Mind your damn' business, Jerry Guard," he said, "and I'll take mighty good care of mine."

Jerry stiffened, exactly as though a whip had lashed him across the face. He was calm, cold, and he nodded. "All right, Dobe," he said. "Have it your way."

THE sheriff had been watching this byplay with intense interest. Suspicion and satisfaction fought for mastery on his face. As Jerry turned and walked away from the cowboy in white lipped silence Murdock chuckled grimly. It seemed as though he had penetrated to the bottom of this puzzle in one inspired plunge, and come up with the truth that one else perceived, a truth of which Dobe's words gave no hint. Murdock's anger was all gone, and a mood of content fell on him.

"Kane, your confession will be regarded as official," he said. "We got witnesses to it. It looks like this case is closed so far as further arrests go."

"Is Jerry Guard free?" demanded Ellen.

"Well," Murdock allowed, "if he can dig up somebody to go his peace bond I guess he can get off. I got no objections—except I'm goin' to insist on that bond bein' good and large. I don't want any more monkeyin' around."

Jerry Guard came over to the officer in two strides. "Take these off me," he requested, holding out his handcuffed wrists. "We'll go right into town and get hold of Sam Benfield and Judge Harvey Williams. Sam will go my bond, and Harvey will hold a hearing for us tonight. I want to get away."

"Good enough," agreed Murdock heartily. "I'll feel better with that cell back of my office occupied."

As Jerry Guard followed the others into the night he halted beside Ellen and took her hands. "I'll be back," he promised her. The deep, quiet joy in her eyes was ill matched by the sober preoccupation in his own. "I don't know where I'll be ridin' before this is over, or when I'll come; but be here—'cause I'll be wanting you." He was gone.

Mrs. Murphy sighed. "Goodness me, they're all alike," she observed to Ellen. The girl stood in the open doorway. "I mind the time my Danny was cleared," went on Mrs. Murphy. "He was with me that night, and a rider from his own outfit came to tell him the real killer had been shot in a gun fight, confessin' before he died that he'd done what my Danny had been accused of. You'd think Danny would stay and share his happiness with me then. But no—what d'you think he did?"

"What?" murmured Ellen, watching the men and horses in the moonlight.

"Sure he rode his horse half to death into town—and pulled a gambler out from behind his table at the Blue Bullet saloon to lick him for calling Danny a blackguard in his absence. And the crazy loon had to spend the night in the lock-up!"

VI

JERRY GUARD slept in his own house that night, and in the morning he cooked breakfast in his kitchen without fear of molestation. But for a man who has been cleared of a hideous charge of murder he was singularly lacking in cheer. He sat brooding over the table long after his coffee had grown cold, and the saucer was filled with cigaret stubs by the time he stirred. Even then he spent no time on the routine that normally would have claimed him after breakfast. He simply buckled on his gun belt, slapped on his Stetson, and went outside. He threw a forkful of hay into the corral, where a sleek black whinnied and ran up inquiringly, saddled the bay, and rode off in the direction of town.

The sun was high when he arrived, and the lazy little community of Campbell was in the midst of the morning's activities. From the blackmsith's shop came the ringing sound of hammer on anvil; the white painted restaurant spread an aura of savory odors abroad, stews and roasts and other substantial dishes; Shultz, the carpenter, going mysteriously hither and yon with plank or saw, shouted cheerful greetings to every one who passed his yard, unintelligible in most part for the nails he carried in his mouth. Jerry drew up before Benfield's store and whistled inside.

Old Sam appeared in the door, his red face grinning at sight of his caller. "You're abroad early for a man with a ranch on his hands, Jerry," he greeted. "Ain't you had enough ridin' for a while?"

"Plenty, Sam," Jerry smiled wryly. "But I figure I got a lot more before I can get back to work."

"Well," the portly storekeeper observed cryptically, "a man has to decide a lot of things for himself in this world."

"Yeah. You heard any news this morning yet, Sam?"

"Nothing, you'd call news. Had a talk with Sheriff Murdock though."

"He had any more bright ideas?"

"No, but he told me about the idea he got last night. It's real interestin'."

"What is it?"

"Well," Sam explained with relish, "it seems he was right buffaloed when Dobe walks in and says he did the killin' last night. After all the trouble you caused him, he was dead set ag'in givin' you up. But with Dobe actin' so unusual, he figgers there must be a reason—and not a common ordinary one either. So he found him one.'

"More than I can do," observed Guard.

"Murdock is a clever man," assured old Sam. "You bet he's clever." He watched the young rancher closely. "He says that Dobe is in love with Ellen, and consequent that he hates you for beatin' him out. That he did the killin' like he says. And that he gave up and saved you when he found out last night that Ellen was gone on you and lost to him complete. He did it because it was the only thing he could do for her happiness—and it was cuttin' him like knives because it gave her to you."

"That's Murdock's idea?" exclaimed Jerry. "Why, the man's crazy! I been livin' with Dobe all of two years, and I ought to know if he loved Ellen. He hardly ever talked of her."

Sam Benfield shook his head slowly. "Amazin' how blind some young fellers can be," he declared. "He never talked maybe, but how about yourself?"

"Well—sure, I talked to him about her. Had to talk to somebody."

"Yeah. And Dobe listened to all you had to say?"

"Him and me were kind of friends, Sam," said Jerry. He spoke as though that explained everything.

"You think so?" queried Benfield dryly.

"Well, good God, man—!"

"Stop! I ain't arguin'!" protested old Sam. "I ain't got a word to say. I'm only tellin' you what Murdock has figgered out."

Jerry sat in his saddle thinking hard. It was a new angle to the case anyway, one that sounded plausible to an outsider. Jerry felt that he knew better, but there was some fool reason behind Dobe's behavior last night. Could it be that?

"I'm goin' down to see Murdock," he declared. "Maybe we can make sense out of this by workin' together. You keep an eye open, Sam, and let me know what you can find."

"You bet," said old Benfield. "Drop in before you ride home."

Jerry agreed, and headed the bay down the street to the brick one story building which was the combined lock-up and sheriff's office.

MURDOCK was in, busy with a litter of papers on his desk, when Jerry entered. The sheriff glanced up and a faint frown crossed his face at sight of his visitor. Jerry Guard spelt nothing but trouble for the harassed officer.

"You in again?" he said. "I been hopin' you'd tend to business on your place for a couple of days anyway."

Jerry smiled humorlessly and sat down on a chair beside the desk. His gun sagged low against the rungs of the chair, and the sheriff's eyes fell on the weapon immediately.

"Say, you ain't got the right to carry a gun into town, Jerry Guard!" he declared. "You're under a peace bond, and they're mighty touchy things to monkey with."

"Lissen, Sheriff, for the love of Pete stop pickin' on me and let's get somewhere! I ain't fool enough to forfeit old Sam's bond by lookin' for trouble."

But Murdock was convinced of the wisdom of his course. "You been sayin' a lot of unpleasant things about me, Guard; don't add to them now. And let me have that gun. You'll get it back when the bond is lifted."

"But man, I got another out at my place!"

"I'll take that too if you wear it in town. Take that off you."

Jerry was fuming with irritation, but he was in no mood to fight it out. He stood up and unbuckled the belt. Murdock came from behind his desk and waited, taking the belt in his hand as Jerry surrendered it.

Just then the entrance was filled by a tall, great-shouldered man. He wore a bushy, grizzled beard and his eyes were blue and placid on a weathered face. He was known to the two men, and all through that country, as Beaver Bob, a lone silent man who dwelt in the wilds the year round and lived in the past that was even before his time, the halcyon days of the beaver trappers. Now he stared calmly at the two men before speaking and then addressed himself to the sheriff.

"I been told you arrested this Dobe feller for a killin'," he stated.

"Yes," encouraged Murdock.

The old trapper thought this over a moment. Murdock stood beside his desk where he had come to receive the gun belt, and the weapon dangled in its holster by his knee.

"Well, he didn't do it," said Beaver Bob.

"He claims he did," Murdock suggested tactfully.

"I come to town this mornin'," the trapper went on, "and a feller told me that. He says Dobe was supposed to have killed a man between four and five, day before yesterday afternoon. Well, I'm tellin' you he didn't."

"Why? Do you know who did?"

"No," replied Bob. "But I was settin' traps along Juniper Ridge back of where that Dobe feller was cuttin' hay. Wolf traps, they was; and I got one coyote this mornin'. Five of 'em was turned over and sprung on me, but the sixth—"

"Yes, but what about Dobe Kane?"

"I'm gittin' to that," was the imperturbable response. "Well, that afternoon I had all them traps set and nothin' special to do. So I sits down on that ridge and visits with Dobe."

"Visits with him?"

"That's a way I have of speakin'," explained the trapper. "He didn't even know I was there. But I sits down and watches him work and sorta talks to him, augerin' and wranglin' like he was with me. You see, I don't git down here much," he apologized, "and it kinda gets lonesome sometimes. So I was glad to get a chance to visit a while with the Dobe feller."

"Good Lord, man!" exclaimed the sheriff. "How long were you there? Did you have a watch?"

"Don't need none. I kin tell time better 'n any watch when the sun ain't covered. I was up on Juniper first long about two o'clock or a little after, and I didn't go until I saw Dobe unhitch the team and head fer home, which was nigh six."

THE two men received this news in immobility for a long, tense interval. Separately their minds hurdled this latest obstacle to the solution of the mystery, and swiftly they both arrived at the same inevitable conclusion. Jerry's arrived there first, and with a sudden movement he dove for the sheriff and jerked the gun from the confiscated holster dangling low at his side.

"Put 'em up, Murdock!"

"Guard!" cried the officer. "I arrest you again for the murder of Kevin O'Neil. Put up that gun. Put it up, you fool—you'll be lynched when this comes out!"

Jerry Guard laughed bitterly. "I knew your lightning brain would get around to that, Murdock. I won't argue. But I won't stand for this arrestin' business. If you'd spent half as much energy tryin' to find who did the killin' as you've spent on arrestin' me—"

"You yellow cur!" grated the sheriff. "Lettin' an innocent man go to the gallows for your crime! Standin' behind the skirts of a woman!"

Jerry's lips were compressed to white thinness. "If I was the killin' sort, Murdock, I'd certainly shoot you for that," he said.

Beaver Bob stood back with his hands half raised in evidence of his neutrality, and he watched them both in mild-eyed wonder.

The sheriff held his hands above his shoulders, and his big frame trembled with impotent rage. There was a fury of despair on him, for he could never recover from the black mark on his record now, with a prisoner escaping from him twice in forty-eight hours.

Jerry edged toward the door, his eyes never leaving the officer's face. On the step he halted, breathed deeply, and whirled about. The bay was at the sidewalk, and he was on in a jump, neck-reining and raking her sides with his spurs. The horse leaped into a gallop, streaking up the short street like the wind, while Jerry crouched low in the saddle.

A gun barked behind him, but he heard no bullet, for the very air whistled in his ears. Past Sam Benfield's he went, catching a glimpse of the storekeeper coming through the door, and in a moment he was out of town, scorching the dust of the road. He urged the bay with tense imprecations, and soon the cries, the angry barking of guns, and the town itself, was left behind when he dropped over a rise just high enough to give him shelter.

He did not let up. The bay held the gallop, nostrils flaring, great heart beating, her whole being afire in response to the urgent need of her master in his hour of peril. And the dusty sage flew by, and the broken country to the northwest drew nearer.

VII

A TINY fire glowed in the darkness high up on the side of Misery Cañon. It was not visible up and down the cañon, nor from the ridge opposite, for it was sheltered by a split in the rocky formation and by the brush that grew at the edges of the opening. It was not properly a cave, but it was dry, comfortable, and it enabled an occupant to see about him a great deal more easily than he could be seen. An old game trail wandered up the side of the rising ground past the site and over the ridge, offering a front and back door for escape. There was no water, and an attacking party could easily reduce it with a determined assault. But it would have to be discovered first—it was purely a hideout, and it suited Jerry Guard very well.

He was just turning a browned flapjack from the pan onto his tin plate when a lean quiet figure materialized out of the night into the circle of light. Jerry promptly dropped a perfectly good flapjack into the flames, going for his gun, and he actually would have accomplished a killing had he not been shocked into immobility at recognizing Dobe Kane.

The cowboy stood before him, smiling slightly, almost wistfully, his fingers deftly rolling a cigaret. "Lo, Jerry," he offered.

"Dobe Kane!" said Jerry, in accents of complete incredulity.

"Yeah, it's me," Dobe assured him, and he eased himself to the ground beside the fire. "Kinda thought you'd be here."

Jerry Guard stared for a moment at his rider while his mind struggled with this new conception of the cowboy—this old one rather, for Dobe was as though the events of the past evening had never happened, as though they sat together untroubled and at ease in the manner of the days before old O'Neil's murder.

All that day, which he had spent in full flight before the dogged pursuit of Sheriff Murdock, Jerry had tried to solve the mystery of Dobe's behavior. Everything else dwindled to insignificance before that. He considered the theory advanced by Sam Benfield, and felt that he must reject it. Whatever had caused Dobe's astonishing enmity was a bewildering mystery. And it could hardly be simple self-sacrifice, for the cowboy had been mighty convincing in his venom, and besides there was no earthly excuse for it as a hoax.

Up in the hills that afternoon Jerry had outdistanced the officer's hottest pursuit, partly by superior horseflesh and partly by guile in doubling on his tracks. By a circuitous route he had made his way back into the valley, but everywhere he went there seemed to be parties of men, and he had been able to talk to no one. Even at Jensen's a trio of horses hitched outside the house had scared him away. At nightfall, bewildered and unhappy, he had come straight to the hideout, where the equipment was still cached, and cooked his first meal since morning.

Then Dobe had come out of the night.

"How come you're here?" asked Jerry, not knowing what to say.

"Judge Williams gave me a hearin' and threw my confession out of court," Dobe explained casually. "Nobody would believe me. I ain't been called a liar so much in one day ever before. Murdock even chased me out of his combined hoose-gow and office at the point of a gun."

"But—what was the idea, Dobe? You didn't do the killin'."

"Well, I thought I did for a while anyway, which is just as good."

"Listen here," Jerry demanded, "I want to know what you were raving about last night?"

"Oh, that? That was only to kid Murdock along. I didn't mean any of it."

"But why—Dobe, you had me near set to go gunnin' for you, and I didn't even know what for!"

The cowboy smiled slyly and glanced at Jerry. "I was hopin' you'd fall for it," he said with satisfaction.

"I did. But why?"

"Well, the only way I could make you act as though mebbe I really did kill somebody was to put a bug in your ear and let it buzz. It kept you busy while Murdock convinced himself I wasn't lyin'. Then you could go out and find the guilty fella without him taggin' after you all the time."

"Dobe, that was a grand-stand play, and nothing else!"

"No, sir. I wasn't in any real danger for a minute. Now let's forget it. I'm hungry, and you got to make up a new batch of flapjacks anyway. How many new suspects you been discoverin' today?"

And that was all Dobe offered in explanation of his fantastic behavior. He shrugged his shoulders and changed the subject when Jerry tried to make him talk about it. It had served its purpose; it had done even better, since they were both now at large; and with luck they might get something done on the case tomorrow.

"All right, Dobe," Jerry said resignedly, "but remember this—just because you're a friend of mine you got no right to cheat me out of the only murder I ever done. Next time you get fired!"

The two men glanced at each other. For a second their eyes held, and then they both grinned, abruptly and with a complete restoration of their old good humor. Jerry's heart was warm and content again for the first time in twenty-four hours.

THEY were smoking on either side of the dying coals, the remains of their meal on the ground before them, when Dobe's keen ears caught a sound coming out of the night. He motioned for silence and sat immobile, listening. Jerry strained his ears also, but heard nothing.

After a moment it came to them again from down in the cañon—the sound of a horse cautiously advancing up the steep trail.

Dobe Kane moved from the fire with the litheness of a panther, his gun in his hand hammer cocked. Immediately he merged with the outer darkness, and not a sound came from where he vanished. There was no moon and even the stars were dim. Jerry covered the soft glow of the coals with the pan, and stood motionless at the entrance to the niche, alert to run up the rising trail. His horse was below, and he would be in a desperate situation without it, but his retreat that way was blocked. He cursed softly for not making a better provision for escape through his back door.

A shrill neigh pierced the black silence and promptly it was answered by Jerry's bay. Next a cry of inquiry, plaintive and troubled, came to the young rancher's ears. It made him start with surprise and amused delight.

"Jerry Guard!" the unknown bellowed. "Where in tarnation are you? Git down here and rescue me! I can't go for'ards and this dang horse won't back!"

"Sam Benfield!" cried Jerry with joyous relief. "Dobe, show him the way!"

In a moment old Sam arrived on the ledge, puffing and voicing his discomfort with every step. Dobe followed, grinning widely. Jerry started the blaze anew with some dry *manzanita*, and the storekeeper sat down on a rock and mopped his brow.

"Next time you're gonna commit any murders," he complained loudly, "you let me know, and I'll git outa the country. Or else do your hidin' out in my back yard. This is too plumb onconvenient!"

"That's an offer, Sam," assured Guard. "I'll remember it."

Benfield found his breath. "I ain't got much time, Jerry, 'cause soon as I'm missed in Campbell, Murdock's gonna go hog wild knowin' what would send me ridin' at this time of night. But I had to get you this message. It's from Ellen O'Neil. She says you're to meet her at Red Mesa Spring tonight about eleven o'clock."

"Ellen? Tonight?"

"Yep. She drove in town lickety split about sundown, and tore right back after tellin' me that. She was lookin' for Dobe, but he'd disappeared." He chuckled. "Ernie was detailed to keep cases on Dobe here, and late this afternoon I saw him gallopin' around town like a dog with a tin can on his tail. He was askin' everybody if they'd seen Dobe. Seems Dobe jobbed him some way and beat it. But everybody Ernie asked had just seen Dobe up the other end of Campbell, and I bet Ernie did twenty laps up and down the street before he got wise."

There was an appreciative grin on the cowboy's face, but he made no comment.

"Well, I can't even stop for a smoke," Benfield said with a gusty sigh. He got to his feet. "I left the store all lit up and the door locked. That ought to keep 'em busy figgerin' it out till I git back."

"I sure appreciate you makin' this trip, Sam," said Jerry.

"Don't bother. Dang it, ain't I got to git my money back somehow what I put up for you on that peace bond! Murdock claims it's forfeit, but if he tries to push it I'll sure nail his official hide to the jail door. Don't you worry none about that; he had no right to ask for a bond on a incurable killer like you anyway."

"Lord, I hope they don't—"

"They won't. Me and Harvey Williams

runs things in that town, so fergit it. I'm goin'. Come around and see me when you find the fella you're lookin' for. You doped out who it is yet?"

Jerry grinned wanly. "Ain't had much chance."

"Well, git busy. I'll be lookin' for you. Now git me headed right and I'll be going."

Accompanied by Dobe the portly storekeeper descended the narrow trail. Already a thin sliver of light appeared and the way was clearer in the first moon glow.

VIII

THE bay mare was tired, almost exhausted, and though Jerry suffered for her he forced the animal over the flat sage country to Red Mesa Spring without a halt. He had intended to stop at his corral today to turn her in for the black gelding, a willing and reliable horse, if inferior to the mare. There had been no chance. "I'll even this up soon, old lady," he told the horse, rubbing her dust caked neck. The mare kept to her moderate lope with the tenacity of a weary but indomitable heart.

Jerry could see no one in the shadow of the cottonwoods as he approached the spring, but the eager whinny of a horse informed him of Ellen's presence. When he dismounted and threw the reins over his mount's head his eyes found her waiting beside the tree where he had sat in vain expectation of her coming the day before. She wore a brown riding suit which merged in the shadows and made her face seem to glow alone against the leafy darkness.

"Ellen, dear!" he said when he came up and took her in his arms. He felt serenely happy to look into her moonlit eyes, and strangely lacking in the tumult that beset him the night past. There was a sterner mood on him, as though he sensed the need of his strength for an ordeal ahead.

"I'm glad you've come, Jerry," she said. "I've been sitting here a long time."

"Honey, all I needed to know was that you wanted me," he told her.

"I heard what happened this morning," Ellen went on. "I saw Sheriff Murdock heading north with a posse. Jensen came to tell me later why they were riding. I saw them coming back this afternoon—without you."

"They sure did," he chuckled.

"I was at the gate when they went by. All day I had watched up the road for them to return—all day, Jerry, waiting, not knowing how you were, or if—" She paused, catching her breath.

"Ellen, girl—you mustn't!"

She sighed, and went on composedly. "Last night everything seemed all right again. It was hard to give up that brief—happiness."

"Happiness?" he queried. "I couldn't be happy—with Dobe to hang."

She made no reply.

"Could you?" Jerry persisted. "Could you see him die, feelin' he was innocent?"

Again there was that little catch of her breath, and her voice held a throaty quality when she spoke.

"I think so—even Dobe—anybody—before I had to see you die!"

It was given to Jerry then to see the full measure of love in this woman who was his. It thrilled him at the same time it touched him with awe. He felt himself in the presence of something timeless and greater than his knowledge.

"DOBE came back to my hideout," he said at last. "He didn't talk much."

"He wouldn't, Jerry. Tell me," she asked, "do you know Dobe well?"

"I been thinkin' so. Sam Benfield told me today I didn't."

"He's probably right. You have been taking Dobe's loyalty for granted, but I think it's a kind that doesn't come very often."

"Gosh, I know that," exclaimed Guard. "He's stuck to me right, and he didn't have to a bit."

"He's been behind you every step you took, Jerry, hasn't he?" Ellen continued. "He has had little to say, but he's done plenty when it came time for action. He's taken your orders without a word when you were giving them short and crisp. But did you ever stop to wonder how he felt at all?"

"Well—" Jerry hesitated. "Not much, I guess, Ellen."

"Jerry, he grinned and joked and cheered you up when you needed it bad—and when he needed it worse!"

Guard did not understand. "How come?"

"He loved me, Jerry."

"What? Him—Dobe?"

"Yes, Dobe Kane. He knew it was

hopeless. Long ago he came and told me, respectfully, wanting me to understand. He knew—I guess even before I did—that I loved you, Jerry. He did not mention your name, but he said that when we two married he would pack his bed in his slicker and drift—he wanted me to know that, to explain to you after he had gone."

Jerry was silent. This was the most bittersweet thing had ever come to him. The loyalty of this man touched him deeply, and the loss of such a friendship, so inevitable a loss, was poignant beyond words in his heart.

She put her head on his breast then and sighed softly, clinging to him. "I have been wanting you so today, dear; to hold you and watch you and forget the terrible things that come up in my imagination. Women have always done that, it seems, sitting and waiting at home while the man—" She shuddered. "I have been seeing things, Jerry. I mustn't."

"Don't you worry no more, honey," Jerry soothed her. Suddenly he laughed, softly and a bit shakily. "Why, I could grab the world by the tail tonight and throw it clear across the moon. Girl, girl, I'm gonna get out of this jam so fast that Murdock will never get his breath back!"

She said nothing, resting on his strength and drawing a renewal of her own from the abundance that he possessed now. They stood together in silence in the moonlight and their troubles and dangers were for a while very, very far away indeed.

THEN she stirred. "I went for you for another reason too, Jerry. I've got something I wanted to show you. I found it today in my uncle's desk."

Jerry released her while she drew from inside the neck of her waist a small paper. It was wrinkled and bore writing in a hand too awkward to decipher in the moonlight. He struck a match and held it close. For a moment he studied the inscription, and then an exclamation of astonishment escaped him.

"God! Ellen, this is—this may mean—"

"Do you think so, Jerry?" Eagerly Ellen urged him. "I didn't know. I wanted to see if you thought of the same thing I did."

"This is in your uncle's writing. A note for five hundred dollars, payable to your uncle—but signed by Manuel Ortega! God! Here's the very foundation of evidence—a motive. The sneakin' sidewinder! I never thought of any motive in his case, and I never suspected him at all—not of that!"

"Don't let's be too sure, Jerry. This alone doesn't mean anything."

"No, it don't. But I'm going to make sure of that before I get rid of the idea. I was up lookin' for Manuel today to have another talk with him, but he wasn't on Jensen's place. I been plannin' to do that, and I sure am goin' through with that plan now—tonight!"

"Jerry!" she exclaimed, suddenly afraid. "No, you can't! Send Dobe, or let me talk to Sheriff Murdock."

"I'm goin'," Jerry insisted. "He may be gettin' ready to leave. He may be leavin' tonight. I've got to see him."

"Please, Jerry!" Ellen begged, clinging to him. "Don't you see! If he can kill one man, he won't hesitate to kill another."

Jerry chuckled grimly down at her. "I never killed a man, Ellen, but startin' on him would be easy. There's things—" he hesitated. "There's things maybe I can't get real righteous about, and even if your uncle is dead, I'll say that maybe Manuel did more than he really intended under unusual aggravation. But I can get plain murderous when I think of him framin' me—just when I found you, Ellen, after all I waited."

"Yes, Jerry—but, oh, I'm afraid, I'm afraid—"

He held her firmly from him and studied her face. "You remember what you said about sittin' home and waitin'? Well, that's your job, Ellen. You wouldn't have me hidin' and sendin' others to defend me, now, would you?"

Her eyes gazed into his while she formed her answer. There could be only one, she knew. She drew erect and her rounded jaw was firm with courage.

"No, deep down in me I don't, Jerry. If this is a fight, it's your own fight—and I can only be yours utterly when you come to me—after fighting the good fight. Winning or losing doesn't matter."

He drew her close then, and her arms went about him. For a moment more they stared silently at each other, and their lips met. They kissed, and drew apart, and she left his arms.

"Go, Jerry," she said. "I'll be waiting for you to come back."

He turned and strode to his horse, and in a moment was but a receding shadow in the night as he galloped on his grim errand.

IX

IT WAS almost an hour later when Jerry rode into the wide high walled mouth of Misery Cañon. The moon now was well on its journey across the sky, a little lopsided but quite able to reveal the rugged, broken and tangled corner of country that bore so fitting a name. Willows grew along the little creek on the bottom, and in scattered patches among the barren rocks juniper and *manzanita* vied with pine and aspen for dominance on the slopes.

Jerry halted well in the cañon and drew his six-gun. Three rapid shots he snapped into the air. Leisurely he reloaded, and replacing the gun, waited. Minutes passed, while he stared through the moonlight up the valley. He was fingering the gun with a half formed intention of repeating the signal, when from a shadowed group of aspen near by a horse appeared at a bound and galloped to him. It was Dobe Kane.

"What's up?" he demanded when he pulled to a skidding stop.

"No trouble," assured Jerry. "That is not yet. I want you to come along. I'm ridin' to town."

"Say, I left a pot of beans bubblin' on the fire up there," protested the cowboy.

"Let 'em bubble till they bust. We're going to eat at home again after tonight."

"Oh!" Dobe whistled softly. "So that's it, eh? Beans—huh! Well, what you stallin' about? Let's get goin'!"

Jerry laughed aloud. Dobe Kane's insolent eagerness was a joyous relief to his taut nerves. "Right!" he said. "Let's go."

They dared not push the horses too hard, and the animals were permitted to take up an easy gait that would get them to Campbell in a little more than an hour. The pace allowed them to talk in snatches, riding side by side, and Jerry gave Dobe a brief account of his meeting with Ellen and told of the note she had found. He described the plan of action he had formed. He said nothing of the conversation of which Dobe was the subject. The cowboy made little comment, but his eyes held a gleam of satisfaction at the promise of real action at last.

Several times they halted and dismounted, allowing the horses to rest. The night was clear and still, and as they smoked they talked in subdued voices of the past three days and the possible day to come. Jerry felt a certain constraint indeed; Dobe seemed to him a stranger by comparison to his old feeling of intimacy with the rider. The thought of that great space in Dobe's life of which he had never talked and which at times must have gnawed at his heart with intolerable pain made Jerry feel that he had never known the man. Again that sense of poignant loss came to him and he fell silent, baffled and chilled by this shadow that must fall on his happiness. He did not dare speak of it.

They rode on. As they approached the town a change came over them again. They grew hard, curt of speech, alert of eye. The moment of action had come. Just before the little rise outside the town they halted. Dobe understood the plan of action, and he nodded silently at Jerry's last few instructions.

"I'll take care of my end; you can count on that," he said finally. "And don't you git careless, fella. I got a hunch your job will be cut out for you." He turned his horse's head. "*Adios!*" And he went trotting off in the night at a tangent to the town.

Jerry walked the bay along the road, and at a deserted shack on the edge of the town he dismounted and tied the reins to a pole in the rear. He moved the gun in his holster a few times, glanced once down the silent empty street, and set out on foot.

AS HE passed Benfield's store he hesitated and stood in thought. But only for a moment, for the inevitable stir of rousing old Sam might endanger his plan. It would not do. He went on. He passed the restaurant, the carpenter shop, the livery stable. In the stable a light burned somewhere, evident by the faint gleams on one window. Jerry moved swiftly. He eyed the sheriff's office suspiciously, but it held not a sign of life. Past that he went, and then he studied the straggling buildings beyond with care. His directions, obtained from Dobe, were explicit, and he soon picked out the low frame house, unpainted and unkempt, that was the home of Manuel, and which was scarcely distinguishable from the half dozen shacks around it on the alley behind the jail.

Jerry tiptoed into the yard. No light showed, no sign of watchfulness was evident.

He reached the door and stood listening. He could just barely distinguish the heavy slumberous breathing inside. The knob, as he tried it, gave to his hand, and he had the door open without an alarm.

The floor squeaked beneath his first step inside. He froze with the door half open behind him, the moonlight beaming in on a section of the bare board floor. Across the room the breathing, now quite audible, continued. From an inner room issued a sodden snore. He pushed the door closed and advanced a second step.

There came a change in the quality of the sounds of slumber across the room that made Jerry's nerves tauten with suspense. This was a desperate job, not only because of the resistance Manuel would certainly offer if he were guilty of the murder, but because any unusual sound or disturbance in the quiet of the night would arouse Eben Murdock and all his newly created deputies. Manuel must be made to submit without noise.

One thing was necessary—in this unfamiliar room Jerry had to have a light. He felt in his pocket for matches. Then his alert senses perceived something else. The odor of liquor. It was really heavy on the air of the room. If Manuel were dulled with alcohol, particularly if his nerves were shaken by it, the task would be an easy one. He reached down and rubbed the match gently against the sole of his boot, to and fro. In a second it ignited abruptly and silently.

Jerry found himself halted just before a table, on which stood a lamp. He reached out, lifted the globe, and applied the match to the wick. And as he was replacing the glass globe something whizzed by his face and thudded against the near by wall. There it quivered and gleamed in the light with the sheen of polished steel—a knife.

JERRY whirled, his gun leaping out and menacing the other side of the room. Among the tumbled, ragged coverings on the rude couch he saw the swarthy face of Manuel, teeth gleaming, crouched and ready to spring, and in his hands a second knife. He was fully dressed, as though he had only thrown himself on the couch. The reason was apparent, as was the source of the odor of liquor—the resonant snores from the rear room told the story. Manuel's señora had been on a tear.

"What you come here for, eh?" he demanded, his voice low and tense.

Jerry brought the muzzle of the gun about till it bore directly on the man. "Out of that!" he ordered. "I want you, hombre."

"What for, eh? You tell me, I bet!"

"I'll tell you," Jerry assured him grimly. "Come on and find out."

"You want I should go out with you?"

"Nothing else."

"Then maybe you come an' make me go out, eh?" Manuel showed the blade in his hand as a coyote might bare his fangs. He held it in the manner of a genuine knife fighter, point forward, the butt of the haft in the palm of his hand. So wielded it is a weapon of ghastly efficiency.

"Why, you yellow greaser," grated Guard, "I'll throw a bullet into you in ten seconds if you aren't on the floor!"

"I think you will not, hombre," gloated the Mexican. "You shoot—Sheriff Murdock come in a minute. You don' want to see him!"

Jerry was a little nonplussed. This attitude of defiance was not what he expected. Panic-stricken resistance, the fury of a murderer at bay—these he could have handled. But it would be an impractical business to haul the man out of his bed and kidnap him bodily.

An idea came to him, a reckless, dangerous idea—but it might work. He smiled thinly, his eyes narrowed, and he stepped backward to the wall where the first knife was embedded in the wooden wall. He jerked it out and thrust the gun in his holster at the same time. Then he advanced step by step to the couch again.

A gleam of fire burned in Manuel's eyes. His swarthy face twisted into an evil grin. But first his curiosity demanded satisfaction. "One minute, hombre. What for you come here tonight, eh?"

"You know damn' well, Manuel. I want you—I want you for the murder of Kevin O'Neil."

"What you do with me?"

"That will remain to be seen. We got a ride ahead of us first."

"Well, I no go riding. What you gonna do about it?" The Mexican bared his teeth, at the same time bracing himself for a leap should Jerry attack.

For an interval of minutes they remained motionless, facing each other within thrusting distance. Jerry held his knife as did the Mexican. He was not a knife fighter, but he was a bigger man and heavier. He felt sufficient confidence in himself to face the gleaming blade—and besides, he wished to know if the Mexican were yellow.

Then Manuel struck.

Jerry felt himself flinching instinctively from the darting menace of the knife. He threw himself to one side, raising one arm to ward off the blow. It was a move no knife-wise man would make. The Mexican's blade, coming forward on a lunge, recovered and swept upward in a sudden slash. Jerry felt the searing bite of it in his left arm.

For a second the sickening dread of cold steel, that is every man's heritage, clutched at his stomach. But Jerry Guard was made of sterner stuff. Fury swept over him, berserk anger that reckoned not on the matter of advantages and superior skill. He thrust out his blade and leaped into the glittering circle of Manuel's steel.

The audacity of it saved him. No counter attack the Mexican could devise would divert that knife plunging for his heart. Manuel gasped and rolled to one side, both hands warding off Jerry's attack. They came together on the edge of the couch and threshed about, unable to inflict damage on each other by their very proximity. Off the couch onto the floor they rolled—and Jerry was on top. He let go of the knife in his fighting fury and grasped the wood-cutter's wrists in both his hands. They settled into a straining, tense battle for possession of the remaining knife. And at last Manuel surrendered to superior strength and the blade fell from his limp, twisted fingers.

Jerry promptly kicked it aside and hauled the Mexican out into the middle of the room. Manuel wore a dazed, uncomprehending look, as though he could not understand how defeat had come to him so quickly. His face was smeared with blood. He felt of it apprehensively.

"Don't worry!" assured Jerry. His voice still trembled with the force of his emotions. "That's my blood, not yours. Now get outside."

SILENTLY Manuel lifted his hat from a peg on the wall. In the other room the woman stirred in her sleep and mumbled querulously. Manuel barked a torrent of Spanish at her, but it failed to penetrate her consciousness. She slumbered on serenely by the sounds, and he shrugged his shoulders and looked at Jerry.

Guard waited beside the table, fixing his handkerchief about his bleeding forearm with the aid of his teeth. "Get goin'!" he grated.

Manuel went to the door. As he drew it open Jerry blew out the lamp and was behind him, the gun out and pressed into Manuel's back.

"We're goin' over to Sheehan's livery stable," Guard warned, "and we'll get two horses. If you make a move I'm going to shoot you and run for it. I can't do worse, so don't tempt me."

In silence they proceeded up the empty, moonlit street.

The ease with which they secured horses was a surprise to Jerry. A night hostler was on duty at Sheehan's, and his wakefulness accounted for the light Jerry had observed previously. The hostler took one gasping look at the bedraggled and sullen Mexican, at the blood spattered over both of them, and finally at the businesslike .45 in Jerry's hand—and offered his services with alacrity, not to say downright eagerness. He explained in answer to Jerry's wondering inquiry that Sheehan had given him the job not because there was work to do, but simply to provide him with food and shelter.

He was a waddy on the rocks, he protested as he hastened to procure the two horses and saddle them. In any event, he was a boy no more than twenty, and Jerry, forced to smile at his wide-eyed uneasiness, told him to come out to his place in a day or two for a real job. The hostler thanked him, promised to bring in the worn out bay from where it was hitched at the deserted shack, and saw the strange pair off with evident relief.

Then, side by side, the two rode out of town and headed north at a lope.

DURING the long ride that followed Jerry found himself slowly surrendering to the exhaustion that had been staved off by the excitement of that long day. He had been riding since morning. He was sore of body, numb of mind, and his eyes burned with an overpowering desire to sleep. Constantly he was forced to prod his spirit to alertness. The Mexican rode ahead, brooding and silent, apparently unaware.

They crossed over the floor of the great valley, past still dark ranch-houses, over barren expanses of sand and sage. Several times they halted, and their route was a circuitous, almost aimless progress. It was evident that they were killing time. At last—Jerry hazarded it to be about three-thirty in the morning—they straightened out and headed for the deeper gloom of Misery Cañon.

Up the narrow trail to the hideout they climbed, leaving the horses when it grew too steep, and in the narrow crevice in the rock wall, where a fire burned briskly, they halted and dropped in weariness beside the blaze.

For some moments Jerry did not stir, while the Mexican slowly emerged from his state of indifference and looked about him. He observed the exhaustion apparent on Jerry and his eyes began to glow. Curiosity was uppermost in him; certainly fear was not apparent. He seemed to weigh the chances of escape, and with the patience of his kind, to sit quietly while he studied every angle of his strange situation.

Jerry looked up. "Hombre," he said wearily, "the sheriff is lookin' for me for the murder of O'Neil. You did it."

The Mexican made no response.

"You framed me for the goat when you saw how things broke," Jerry went on. "Nobody thought of you as the killer, and you worked real industrious to implicate me. Ain't that right?"

"What you gonna do with me?" countered the Mexican.

"Never mind. I'm not in a position to do much. I might shoot you. I got to ride; I got to leave this country."

"What you gonna do with me?" repeated Manuel.

"I just told you what I might do, hombre," Jerry said, his voice a little more vigorous. "You don't believe me?"

The Mexican merely stared, his black eyes shining in the fire light.

"I'll tell you one thing, Manuel," went on Guard, "I don't much care what happens next. I've stood a plenty, but I can't take much more. You heard there's a lynch party ridin' for me tomorrow?"

Manuel shook his head.

"Well, there is. Now figure out if you can just how finicky I'm likely to be about disposin' of you. When I say I might shoot you I sure mean it."

"What good that do you?" asked Manuel imperturbably. No longer was Manuel the fawning peon of the past few days. The cunning of his brain kept him level and alert while he dealt with an unknown quantity that seemed to hold large chances of escape. In fact, this gringo might even be disposed of at the same time. Alone out here, with Guard weary to the point of numbness, his vigilance relaxed—Manuel was seething beneath his calm exterior.

"That's just the point," Jerry admitted. "I don't know that it'll do any good especially—except the personal satisfaction I'll get out of it." He sat silently brooding for a minute. The flames danced in his eyes, danced hypnotizingly, so that his heavy lids closed once or twice and he was forced to shake himself to wakefulness. He rose and paced to and fro a few steps. Finally he halted and covered his face with his hands, groaning inwardly with exhaustion and numb despair.

Then the Mexican moved. It was sudden, that move, and it caught Guard completely unawares. Manuel leaped, and the gun from Jerry's holster was in his hand. He grinned malevolently and laughed.

"Señor Jerry," he said softly as Guard recoiled in horror from the menace of the gun, "much better you should sleep more nights. It is not good, so much riding." Again he laughed. "If I should make you sleep—me, with this gun, your own gun, I would do you much good, *no es?*"

X

THEY faced each other across the fire for a minute, immobile, silent. Far off in the night a coyote howled, and Guard shivered. His eyes, red rimmed and filled with bitterness, closed to shut out the misery of defeat. He dropped to the ground again.

"Go ahead and shoot!" he said despairingly. "It'll end this ghastly business anyway."

The Mexican grinned. It was sweet indeed, this moment when the gringo cowed before him. He who had cringed and fawned, who many times had seen that slow narrowing of the eyes of an *Americano* that spelled danger for him and his kind—now he, Manuel, could exact the tribute of fear himself. Down in the country of his home there were men who were not afraid of *Americanos;* men, indeed, the gringos respected and did not try to bully. Manuel thought of them much, and longed to be like them, but he had been too wise to try. Still—he laughed softly—it was not too late. He fingered the raised hammer of the long barreled six-gun and moistened his lips.

"I think I do that when I am ready," he said. "It is no hurry. A man die quick with one bullet—*oof!* Like that!"

Guard looked up. He stared at the Mexican. "Tryin' to scare me, Manuel?"

"Ah, Señor Jerry—you think I waste my time if I try?"

A saturnine smile flickered over the face of the young rancher. "Go ahead—try, you crawlin' mangy skunk!"

Manuel's lips compressed and his eyes narrowed. This reversal of status allowed him to indulge in anger too, and in gusty fashion it swept over his slender frame. "Ah-h!" he breathed harshly. "You call me names! You have called me names before, and I say nothing. You will not call me names when I leave you, Jerry Guard."

Jerry sneered, saying nothing. He sat watching, alert now, his sodden weariness gone from him.

Manuel continued, his voice hot with unleashed hatred. "Yes, I take much from you and all these gringoes, and can do nothing. Always, ever since I come here. Many times I feel my knife and say I stick him in somebody's heart—but no, I hold myself and wait. I work, make money—and my money is taken from me. My horses, my wagon, are to be taken from me. You think I have no—no feeling?"

"Who was taking your horses and wagon?" Jerry asked.

Manuel laughed. "Who, he asks? Who takes my horses and wagon?" His voice sharpened. "No one takes them. No one. I don't let anybody take them. I fight for them—I kill first. Yes, Jerry Guard, I have kill the one who would take them from me!" He paused, his face thrust out fiercely. "And I kill you too!" he spat across the fire.

Jerry averted his face. "Then you did kill O'Neil," he said in a low voice.

The Mexican gained a measure of calmness. He seemed to remind himself that he must relish this situation, and not spoil it by impetuous action. "Yes, I kill O'Neil," he declared flatly. "Sure; it was him who would take from me my team. Long time ago I borrow money from him. He make me sign a paper—my name I can write. I pay him much, give him money every month; I don't know how much money I give him. My wife she tell me I pay too much. O'Neil he say no. My wife say he is liar and she count up money I have paid him. It is more than I am borrow."

Jerry began to see the simple tragedy of it. Usury—peonage. Manuel brooding and feeding his resentment, O'Neil exacting every penny of his exorbitant interest on the loan. It was no new story. The irony of it lay in the fact that O'Neil had brought it on himself.

"I go that day," Manuel went on, forgetting Jerry, remembering only his uncomprehending sense of injustice, "I go to see O'Neil. I leave my work. He is alone in his house. I tell him I am through. He say I must pay so much more. I say no. He tell me he take my team and wagon from me, tell me go to hell, say he have me put in the lock-up. I listen, but I cannot listen long." His hand was a clenched fist, trembling before him as his imagination recalled that moment. "Soon I am like one blind with the madness. I have brought my gun. I do not think—except that my horses go, my wagon goes, I am in the *juzgado*. I shoot; I kill him!"

Manuel sat brooding after that passionate outburst for several minutes, staring into the fire, the gun clutched in his fingers on his lap. Jerry watched him silently. Then he asked, "Did you see me that day, Manuel?"

The Mexican looked up. "Yes, I see you. I wait in the trees until you are gone, for I want to speak to O'Neil alone." A sly smile stole over his features. "I found your little book in the road."

"You did?"

"Yes—after I have shot him. I think up one good idea. I bring it back and leave it on the floor. When they find it—no one think of Manuel. No one see me."

Jerry smiled wryly. "So. Now I see how come those visits on the sheriff that day."

Appreciatively the Mexican grinned back. "Sure. Waste no time. That was one good idea, no?"

"Damn' good!" Jerry agreed. He rose. Manuel was on his feet with him, the gun outthrust.

"You no move, Jerry Guard," he warned menacingly. "This is not finish."

"Yes it is, Manuel," assured Jerry easily.

"YOU'RE damn' tootin' it's finished—signed, sealed and delivered!" came a voice from the night. The Mexican whirled, and beheld the figure of a man in the outer fire light. Behind was another.

With a cry of trapped fury the Mexican raised the gun and snapped a shot point-blank at the advancing man. But there was no shot—only the useless clicking of the hammer on empty chambers.

"I emptied it on our way out here, Manuel," Jerry informed him. "I was right worried for a time that you weren't going to steal it according to plan."

Manuel leaped for him in despairing fury, but the advancing man, Dobe Kane himself, reached out a foot and the Mexican sprawled headlong on the hard rock, precariously close to the flames. He writhed and scrambled to his feet like a cat, but he was too slow to escape seizure by the second man, who lunged from behind Dobe Kane. Manuel squirmed helplessly in the grip of his powerful captor. He subsided, twisted around—and stared into the grim face of Sheriff Eben Murdock.

XI

FOR a long time the two rode in silence, side by side, while the moon and the stars paled and the ridges in the east were edged with the first breathless hint of coming day. Dobe Kane hummed a song quietly and contentedly, offering no interruption to Jerry's thoughts, as was his wont when his boss was moody. Jerry himself watched the rider, unable to bring to words the multitude of thoughts pent up within him.

They arrived before the familiar gate of Jerry's ranch, and halted. Their eyes met. Jerry started to speak, hesitated, and lapsed into muteness.

"What's the matter, old-timer?" encouraged Dobe.

"I'm goin' over to tell Ellen," Jerry offered.

"Right thing to do, you bet." Dobe yawned. "I sure wish you luck, even if you don't need it. Well— Git along, hoss; time for breakfast!"

"I'm going to have a cup of coffee first," Jerry announced with sudden decision. He headed his mount in the gate and led the way to the house.

Jerry started the fire and put the coffee pot on the stove, while Dobe unsaddled the horses and put them in the corral. The wood was burning briskly and the aroma of coffee was just beginning to creep through the kitchen when the rider came in. He saw that Jerry had prepared the table, and he went through into the other room. In a moment he reappeared dragging an armful of possessions: blanket, slicker, tarpaulin, clothes. These he spread in the center of the floor and made into a roll.

Jerry paid no attention to these proceedings. He was silent, and only Dobe's cheerful humming broke the quiet. Then the cowboy sat back on his heels and rolled a cigaret thoughtfully.

"Say, Jerry, d'you realize how optimistic you were, makin' up a plan like that?" he inquired.

"Was I? How?"

"Well, in the first place, supposin' Murdock hadn't been home?"

"You could have got Ernie. Somebody official would be around."

"That's true, at that," reflected Dobe. "But lemme tell you—I almost had to tackle Murdock by the horns and wrassle him all the way out. Man, did he cuss! I told him I'd bend my gun barrel over his head, and that helped some. He finally got dressed and come down-stairs. Guess he thought if I was tellin' the truth he could grab you at least." He chuckled dryly. "We hit the dust for Misery Cañon, and your stalling gave us just time to get set before you arrived. I lit up the fire for you, and hid Murdock behind the brush. Almost had to sit on him when he saw you. He wanted to tackle you right off. It got worse when Manuel lifted the gun. Murdock wanted to shoot, and he didn't care which one. My hair is turnin' white this mornin', hair by hair."

Jerry grinned in spite of his unhappy mood. "Well, I never saw him so humble and chastened as he was when we left him with Manuel in tow."

"We got a blackmail holt on him now, Jerry," Dobe reflected happily. "Givin' him the credit for the arrest sure saves his official face—and if he ever holds me up, I'll look him steady in the eye and mention Misery Cañon, and I bet he'll give me the keys of the town!"

THEY drank the coffee, ate a few chunks of bread, and rolled cigarets. Jerry watched the cowboy, but Dobe kept his eyes averted and hummed his song again. He rose from the table and finished his job on the duffle roll. But he was getting uneasy. Plainly he had expected Jerry to inquire into the meaning of the packing up, and he seemed to be at a loss otherwise.

"Uh—Jerry," he began finally, "you don't mind, maybe, if I take a little trip?"

Jerry stared at him. It had come. He knew that Dobe was well aware of what the ride to O'Neil's would mean, and he remembered what Ellen had told him about the cowboy's intentions.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"Oh, gosh; I got to go down country on some business."

Jerry aimlessly piled the dishes together on the table. "Dobe, Ellen was tellin' me yesterday what you once said to her."

The cowboy stood still. A bleak expression flickered momentarily over his face. "What was that?"

"That you were ridin' when we—when Ellen and I made up."

Dobe Kane did not answer. He picked up the roll, stood a moment in some sort of indecision, and then turned and walked out of the house. Jerry followed to the door. He saw the cowboy enter the corral, expertly catch and saddle his own horse and Jerry's black gelding, and bring them out. The roll was tied behind Dobe's saddle when he rode up to the door leading the black.

"Comin', Jerry?" he inquired.

Guard procured his hat, and came out and mounted the gelding. They walked the horses slowly to the gate. There they stopped.

Dobe rolled a cigaret with elaborate care. Finally he spoke. "Jerry, you and me been friends a long time. You didn't mind my speakin' to Ellen, did you, oldtimer?"

"Oh, damn it, no!" burst out Guard. "Dobe, I can't ask you to stick around—but are you ridin' for good now—as you said?"

"Well, I dunno." Dobe Kane looked off into the glowing east. "Down in the mesa country where I come from there used to be a girl—" He paused, and smiled wistfully. "I wasn't much account," he went on again, "and when this girl told me she'd wait for me till I came back from the ends of the earth, why I just couldn't feel equal to anything like that. I liked her a lot, I guess I still like her. Never could understand what she saw in me, but I guess she saw something. I'm thinkin' of goin' down there again and see if maybe she's still waitin'."

"Dobe!" Jerry's voice was gruff as he held out his hand. "I sure hope she is. And then—you think you'll come back again?"

Dobe stared a moment at Guard and then his eyes dropped. "Oh—guess so," he said. He hesitated. "I kinda—I kinda like this country, Jerry. It's a right nice country for cows. Yeh, maybe I'll set up for myself and be a rancher like you. She's a good country, and I'd like to stay around." He looked directly at Jerry, and his eyes were agleam in the dawn.

Jerry watched him go, riding down the road to the south, erect, sitting easily, his Stetson cocked at an insolent angle, and a clear untroubled song floating back on the morning air. And when Jerry turned about and set the gelding's head the other way another song was rising in his heart, and the breathless glory in the east was dimmed by the greater glory that rode before him on the road to O'Neil's.

The Two Mile SHOOT

An Airplane Story with a Crashing Climax

By RAOUL WHITFIELD

OLD James G. Stafford squinted over the tops of his glasses, listened to Jay Fieldson's final words, and then grunted. After the grunt there was a little silence. Then he turned toward me.

"Mac," he said slowly, "how about George Criss on this job?"

I'm fairly used to surprises—when the boss is talking—but that one was a beauty. George Criss, walking a wing two miles in the sky, and then stepping off! George Criss! The thing seemed almost incredible, coming even from James G. But I gulped a few times, and came up for air.

"Did I get that straight, boss?" I demanded. "You want George Criss to do the wing walk, and the hop-off stuff two miles up? The same Criss who got his wind up in that crash—"

"That's what I mean." James G. snapped out the words. You listened when the boss talked in that tone. "You heard what Jay just said. Bailey's laid up with the mumps—though I don't know why he should get that fool disease just at this time. Rumson's busy on that map job for the Acme people, and Johnnie Hyde can't do his stuff at that altitude. After that last camera-scoop over the World News people we can't borrow any of their boys. Jay, here, is offering us the business. It's a nice job. You can fly her and if Criss hasn't gone all the way down the chute—"

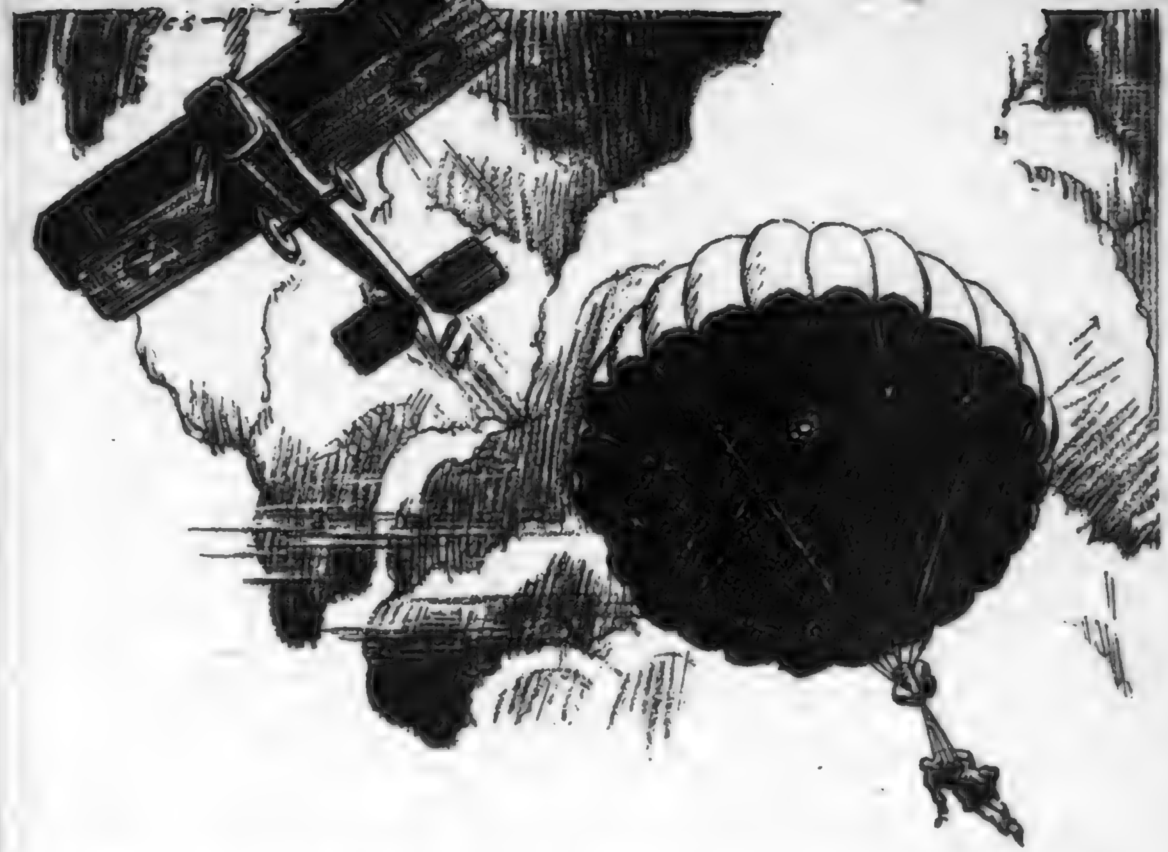
"He has!" I interrupted the boss grimly. "I saw George three days ago. He was driving a truck out near Bakersfield. The only job he's been able to get. I was moving along in a certain lady's roadster, doing around fifty. George almost pulled that truck off the road when he saw us coming. Oh, he's at the bottom of the chute all right. His nerve's gone."

James G. grunted. "I've seen 'em like that before, Mac. And I've seen 'em work a come-back. George Criss was a good stunt man—one of the best in the business."

"He *was*," I agreed grimly. "But he isn't in the business—right now."

THE boss of the Stafford air outfit narrowed his eyes. And I knew right then what was coming. So I waited.

"Dig him up, Mac." James G. spoke in a low tone. "Tell him to come in and see me. Fieldson wants to shoot the stuff tomorrow



afternoon. It's a wing walk and jump, at the ceiling of that new DeHaviland."

"And that's around two miles," I stated. "A long drift down, boss."

"There's plenty of men that would do the stunt." James G. was frowning. "But I can't get at them in a hurry. You can pilot the DeHaviland. We'll send Jay up with Bob Forsom. If we can get clouds, all the better. Right, Jay?"

The star camera man of the Better Pictures, Inc., organization nodded his head.

"Dolly Grey likes class in her westerns—even in the air stuff. Some nice fleecy white stuff would help a lot. Dolly's a good kid—she appreciates anything artistic."

James G. grinned at that one. So did I. We'd both had dealings with Dolly Grey in the past. A hot tempered little lady with a baby-doll face and two wonderful expressions—adoration and fear. As for her appreciation of the artistic—well, it went, in a way. She drew an artistic check from Better Pictures, Inc.

"You go after George Criss, Mac." The boss broke in on my thoughts. "If he pulls himself together long enough to make this walk and jump—well, he can lay off driving a truck for a couple of months. I always liked George. He might come back."

I shrugged my shoulders, got to my feet. It was my own opinion that George Criss was through with wing walking and plane jumping.

"I'll see what he says, boss," I stated. "But unless I'm dead wrong—he'll turn it down."

James G. scowled. "You've been wrong once or twice in your life, Mac," he reminded. "On your way!"

I cleared out. It was hot over Bakersfield way, I knew that. And I was dressed for the more comfortable climate of Los Angeles. So I grabbed the wheel of my flivver and drove toward the bungalow on the outskirts of the city, in which a certain red-headed female allows me to occupy a room and play the saxophone at the same time.

It was my idea to get into something more comfortable—and then rattle toward Bakersfield. I had a hunch that George Criss was driving a truck for some person or persons out that way. He wasn't known in that section, and he probably wanted to keep out of sight for a while. I'd got my wind up during the war—and I could guess how George felt.

I SHOVED the door of my room open and then I pulled up short. No trip to Bakersfield for me. No change of clothes. Standing near the window, his body tensed and his eyes narrowed, was my man. George Criss!

For a second or two I stared. It looked too good to be true. Then I slammed the door shut behind me, and moved toward him.

"Welcome, stranger!" I greeted. "You save me a trip into the desert. I was just about to flivver through the heat for you. How come?"

He started to speak, then stopped. I saw right away that something was up. My eyes got that hunted expression in his, that peculiar expression of fear—fear of something that isn't tangible, easily fought. I waited for him to speak.

Then, for some reason, my eyes dropped—I saw his hands. He was holding the wrist of his left arm, clasping it tightly with the fingers of his right hand. And there was red on that left wrist—red on the faded, green carpet below it. It gave me a jolt. I stared, and then came to life.

"What's the matter with your hand, George? You're hurt!"

I moved toward him, but he stopped me with a swift motion of his right arm. His face was twisted in a snarl—it was the first time I'd ever seen George Criss look like that. Then he spoke.

"Keep off, Mac. It—it isn't healthy. I—I've just killed a man!"

He said it as though he meant it. There was that desperate note in his voice. For a few seconds he had me stopped. Then I got going again. George dropped down in a chair. My voice was a little shaky, but I managed to make myself clear.

"How did you kill him, George—with the truck? Where was it—in the city? How about that hand of—"

"I didn't kill him with the truck." His tone was grim now, low and steady. "I killed him with this." His right hand slid into a pocket of his coat. The automatic was tossed on the rug near the red stain. I looked down at it, trying to get my brain clear. If it hadn't been for that red on his wrist and the green carpet I'd have laughed at him. Even as it was I wasn't quite sure.

I GOT a towel and wet it. Then I handed it to him, and he took it, wrapping it around his left wrist. Then I lighted a cigaret, and gave him one and lighted it for him.

"Shoot, George!" I spoke steadily. "Just what happened, and how did it happen? And why did you come up here?"

He laughed then, a bitter little laugh. His eyes were on mine.

"Afraid you'll be dragged in, eh?" He was sneering now. "Well, you won't. I got away—got away clean. And I guess you can figure why I came here."

I was wondering. It didn't seem to me that Criss was off his head. He looked too keen for that, even if there was that funny expression in his eyes. And he was talking sense. He wasn't babbling.

"Can't quite figure it, George," I stated. "Why?"

He got to his feet abruptly. Holding the wrist he had bandaged with the towel, he walked up and down before me. Then he started to talk. It was as though he wanted to get the thing straight in his own head, as well as tell me about it.

"I got Joe Maller, Mac—I got him right! He had a wrench in his hand—he was out back of that brown-roofed hangar over at the Field. I walked up—told him what I thought of him, pulled the gun. He had it coming and he knew it. He sent me down the chute—he killed Ed Carey. And he knew that, too. He put up a fight, and ripped me with a wrench, in the wrist. Then I got him—twice, through the stomach. There was a ship revving up on the line, at the other side of the hangar. No one heard the shots—the exhaust roar drowned them. I walked across the Field—and came here."

I sat motionless. Joe Maller! That was the one Criss had got. Joe Maller! Owner of the Maller Air Circus, a stunt outfit using the shakiest crates, the worst mess of struts and flying wires in the country. And a rotten human, at that. And George Criss had shot him to death!

"I came up here—" George spoke in a lower tone—"because you stuck by me, Mac, after that crash. Maller killed Ed Carey, he damn near killed me. Worse, I guess. He busted my nerve. Ed was about the finest human—"

His voice broke. He stopped. I sat motionless, waiting. I'd heard it all before—

the rumor of it. Now I was getting the real thing.

"Ed didn't want to fly that ship. He'd stalled out of it a half dozen times. Finally the big job came along. And Maller told him to take her up—with me walking a wing—or quit. Ed's wife needed the money. She was sick—she needed care. So Ed took her up. She fell apart—you know all that. It was murder, Mac—just as much murder as the one I—"

HE STOPPED again. Then, suddenly, he seated himself in a chair. The tone of his voice changed. He seemed to have got control of himself. It was as though he had reached the point he had been after all along.

"I want a job, Mac. You can swing it for me. Oh, I'm not running away—" his eyes were boring into mine. "It's a sort of —well, final job." He smiled weakly. "Not for myself, Mac. Don't go wrong on that. Ed's wife is pretty sick. She's got a chance, but it takes money to give that chance to her. And the kind of a job I want will make that money for her—and plenty more for Stafford."

Then I got him. Then I knew what it was all about. And I could see that George Criss was giving it to me straight. He meant it—he'd got his nerve back, but I sensed there was something he hadn't told me—yet.

"What sort of a job, George?" I managed to keep my voice level—though I knew what was coming.

"The toughest plane stunt you can think up in two hours—you and the boss!" His answer was sharp, swift. "And the one that'll bring you in the most money, too. Something that you can shoot *all the way down*, Mac—right to the finish. Don't worry about me. But we've got to work fast. They'll find Maller, and then—"

He stopped speaking, but his eyes remained on mine. I spoke almost unconsciously.

"I was starting out to find you, George. Jay Fieldson wants a wing walk and jump—for a western film they're shooting for Better Pictures. A two mile shoot, it's to be. The ceiling of the new D. H. we've got out at our field. In, or around some light clouds—if we can get them. The other boys are laid up, not available for one reason or another. And James G. was sending me after you."

"When?" Just that one word from George Criss.

"Scheduled for tomorrow afternoon," I stated.

He shook his head, got to his feet again. Once more he commenced pacing up and down the room. My thoughts went back to the murder. Back there at the hangar, with the roar of a ship on the test-line drowning out those shots. George Criss a killer! It was hard to believe it.

"Too late!" he spoke suddenly, explosively. "Make it this afternoon, Mac. We've got time—we've got clouds. I'll do anything out there on the wing, and I'll get loose in any way you say. If you can follow me I'll drop five thousand before I jerk that 'chute-ring. Don't you see, Mac? It doesn't make any difference to me. I'll get the worst for shooting Maller. What I want now is a chance for Mary—"

HE SAW my start of surprise, and he knew that I'd seen the *real* reason. The thing back of it all. There was a little silence, then he spoke again.

"Well, what of it? I loved that girl. Loved her from the time we were kids. When she married Ed—well, I was pretty hard hit. But Ed was a prince. He did everything in the world for her—right up to the finish. And after that crash, when I got out of the hospital, I went to Maller. Did that rat come through? He did not! He laughed at me when I asked for money to give her the chance. Sneered at me. I tried to borrow. I did get some, but not enough. They all figured my nerve was gone. I wasn't a good bet—"

He checked himself, shrugging his shoulders.

"I got Maller, Mac—and it's funny, but I don't feel much like a killer. He deserved it. But that line doesn't get around the law. I didn't pull any master mind stuff on that shooting. The police'll be after me pretty quick. One final hop-off, Mac! You can swing it—and make money on the pictures. I'll play square with you—"

I raised a hand in protest. I could understand as much as there was to understand. I could see George Criss appealing to that rat, Maller. He was a rat—I'd had dealings with him, and I knew. I could see

Maller sneering. And I could understand how Criss had brooded over the thing—and then, filled with hate for the man who had sent Ed Carey up and then down to his death, hit on the plan. It wasn't all sacrifice. It was hatred—with a little reasoning beyond that point. And now the thing was done. And George Criss was waiting for me.

I hesitated, and George watched me closely. Then he tried to guess what was going on inside my head and missed.

"Won't do you any good to turn me over to the police." He spoke calmly enough. "You'll only cheat a decent woman out of her chance. And you can't help that rat Maller any."

"I don't want to help him," I stated grimly. "And you know that, George. But you might be able to work up some sort of a defence. Temporary insanity or—"

"Don't talk like a fool!" His tone was harsh. "That's done. No defence, Mac—I'm asking for a job—not advice. And I've told you the straight of the whole thing. Do I get it—or don't I get it? That's what I want to know?"

I nodded my head. "You stay here," I instructed. "Fix that wrist of yours up—and keep away from the windows. I'll drive to the office and talk with James G. But I won't say a word about what has happened. Just that I ran into you—and that you can do a wing walk and jump this afternoon. He wants a man badly—he'll pay you the limit. If you tell him why you want more, and what sort of a stunt you're willing to pull—you'll never take the air—not for Stafford."

His lean face twisted, and then he smiled ironically.

"Get all you can for her, Mac. I'll give you the address—before we get into the air. But make it this afternoon. Tomorrow may be too late."

I nodded. A glance back as I closed the door showed me that George Criss would wait. He was staring after me with those grim eyes, his right hand fingers holding the white towel over that left wrist. Then I was down the stairs, in the flivver. As I drove I thought the whole thing out. And I could see Criss's side of it. It looked to me as though he had made a terrible mistake—and had made it in the attempt to do a pretty big thing.

THERE were clouds high in the California sky. Great, fleecy ones. It was a perfect day for a camera-shoot. We had two ships ready at the Field. If we could get Jay Fieldson to shoot the stuff—

I felt a little shiver run through me. A two mile jump-off—but would George Criss pull that rip-cord ring? Would he open the pack 'chute at all?

I reached the office, and I told James G. my story. I'd run into Criss on the street. He had an offer of a job in Seattle. He was going north tonight. I couldn't persuade him to stay over. Finally I had hinted that he'd lost his nerve. And he'd said that he'd do the stuff within a few hours—any stuff we wanted. He'd show us!

I played it up pretty strong and yet not too strong. The boss fell. He got busy with the 'phones. A half hour later he had the thing fixed.

"Four o'clock, at the Field. Monte Bruin's directing the shoot, he'll tell you and George Criss what he wants. The tougher the better. I'll be out, and we'll settle the price out there. We'll make it right. Think Criss can do it without slopping it up?"

I smiled. "It'll be all right," I replied, slowly, and my voice shook so much that the boss gave me a sharp glance.

Then I headed for the elevator again. I'd fixed it for George Criss—but I didn't feel the way a fellow does who has done something like that. I was thinking of the clouds—two miles up. And the cranking camera. And George Criss, out on a wing—

I WAS almost on the street when I saw that head. Hair uncombed, a sort of grease-stained yellow. And shaped something like a bullet. It gave me a jolt, but I came back for a bigger one. Sprinting a bit I pulled up with the man at a cigar stand near the corner. He was lighting up, and as I slowed down he turned toward me.

Joe Maller! Puffing contentedly on a cigar—when I had figured him smoking in the lower regions! I stared and Maller grinned at me.

"'Lo, Mac! How's business with them crates of Stafford's? Makin' money?"

His voice brought me out of it. I nodded.

"Some," I returned. "And we're keeping them from falling apart in the air, too."

Maller grinned more broadly than ever. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Accidents will happen," he stated almost cheerfully. "Say, whatever happened to Georgie Criss?"

I shook my head. There was too much funny stuff going on to suit me. So I decided to play along.

"Haven't seen him in months," I lied gently, and walked back toward the flivver.

Driving back to my room I didn't break any traffic rules—unless it was for slow moving. There was plenty to think about. One thing was certain, Joe Maller was very much alive. George Criss had either lied to me—or he was out of his head. And the deal was all fixed for the two mile shoot in two hours. It was a sweet mix-up.

I decided to let George do a little explaining. But I was going to lead him on, let him run wild on the story of the shooting. There was one thing that puzzled me. The ex-jumper and wing-walker had been hurt. How?

There was a faint smile on my lips as I kicked open the door of my room. I had decided to tell George that everything was fixed and see how he took it. But I didn't tell George anything. There was one, simple reason. Criss was gone!

I looked around. On my desk was a piece of white paper and it hadn't been there before. I walked over and picked it up.

Cop and funny acting man in civilian clothes watching this room. Ducked out back and am heading for Stafford Field. Meet you there, Mac.

That was all. I grunted. What to do? George was still bluffing, that was sure. I moved toward the window, stared down. A heavy-set, dark-mustached individual was pacing back and forth on the far side of the street. At the turns he shot swift glances up my way. I was back of the curtains, and he couldn't see me. But it looked as though George was right. The man looked and acted like a detective—and it was sure that he was watching the house.

THAT gave me something else to think about. Maybe George wasn't crazy, after all. He might have shot the wrong man—some fellow who looked like Maller. It didn't sound probable, but the whole thing was becoming too complicated to suit me. So I did what I figured was the most sensible thing. I sneaked out the back way, let the flivver stay where it was parked.

I was out at the Field in an hour, but there was no sign of George Criss. Jay Fieldson was there, and the director and Dolly Grey. And so was James G. At three-thirty I commenced to get anxious, and the boss had been that way for a half hour.

"You shouldn't have let him get out of your sight," he muttered. "He may have lost his nerve—at the finish."

I was set to put up some sort of an argument when I looked toward the entrance of the Field and saw George Criss coming in. Lean and tall, he had that same old long stride, swinging his arms loosely. He headed straight toward the boss and myself. As he came up I saw that he was white around the lips. His face was set in a grim smile.

He shook hands with James G. and nodded to me. Then the boss spoke.

"Feel set for a two mile hop-off?" he questioned sharply. "Bruin, the director, wants you to open up as soon as possible. He's going to shoot you all the way down. When you hit dirt you're supposed to be unconscious—the idea is to let the 'chute drag you a bit, unless you land bad."

I felt a grim humor at that. Unless something was done—and unless George was framing the whole stunt for God knows what reason—he'd be unconscious when he hit dirt.

"All right." George spoke quietly. I was surprised at his control. A mechanic came up with 'chute-pack and overall suit. George climbed into the suit; I helped him strap on the pack. He fished helmet and goggles out of his pocket.

Bruin, the director of the shoot, came over, accompanied by Fieldson. Forsom, who was flying the camera man, strolled over with Dolly Grey. There were introductions—and then Bruin spoke his piece.

"You are hurt, Criss. Keep your head away from the camera—you're subbing for Mendoza and you're about the same build. We're not shooting a close-up, but we'll get it clear. If you can pull some stagger-stuff on a wing, fine! A fall, holding on to a strut, would go great. Then you stagger to the edge and get clear. The idea is that you're trying to get down to the girl, down to the ground. And the big kick is that you land unconscious. If you can let the 'chute drag you—all the better. If you land where you can't we'll have to cut. A thousand if you drag and pull some good wing stuff. Five hundred—no matter what happens. That suit?"

Criss hesitated. My eyes were on his, and I thought I saw the tortured look, the old expression, flash in them for a second. Then he nodded, a smile playing about his lips. He turned to me, handed me a folded slip of paper.

"The address," he said quietly. "See that she gets it, Mac."

The ships were on the dead-line. I stuffed the paper in my pocket and moved toward our new DeHaviland. Her ceiling was around ten thousand, but I doubted if the ship Forsom was flying could get that high. Ceilings vary, atmosphere has a lot to do with them. But they'd both get close to two miles of altitude, at that.

Just before I climbed into the cockpit—the front one—George came up beside me. I let him have it right then.

"What's the game, George?" I was talking straight and looking straight. "You didn't shoot Joe Maller. I met him on the street, *after* I left you. He hasn't even seen you lately. Wanted to know what you were doing. Better come through."

HE TOOK it pretty hard. At first he straightened, tensed. Then he relaxed. His eyes wavered. He lighted a cigaret with shaking fingers. I stood beside him, waiting.

"Mac," he said slowly, "I lost my nerve. I went over there to kill that rat! I swear I did! But I lost my nerve. Got in a fight with Bailey, Maller's right hand man. He had me thrown out of the Field, after he got me in the wrist with a screw driver he was using. Then I headed for your place. I figured that if I made it strong enough you'd stand back of me. I'd intended to do a final jump-off, anyway. It's straight about Mary—the girl. Just as I told you. Then you ran into Maller. Guess he wasn't at the Field. That's the truth, Mac. I wanted to get him—but I lost my nerve."

I looked him squarely in the eyes—and I knew he was telling the truth this time.

"And it's damned lucky for you," I said slowly, "that you did!"

He was silent. The roar of the camera-ship's engine sounded over the Field. They were testing her out, with blocks under the wheels. I looked up toward the white, high clouds.

"George," I said slowly, "can you do your stuff? If you can't—say the word. I'll see that you get some money—for the girl. But don't go up there if you've lost your—"

The expression in his eyes stopped me. He gave his 'chute-pack a final pat. Then he climbed into the rear cockpit. I got in back of the controls. I was pretty doubtful. I was thinking of the fellow who had been watching the house. And just as I taxied the D. H. across the Field, headed into the wind, it came to me. The police were after a man by the name of Stevens, wanted as a witness in a perjury case. And he had lived in the house next to the one in which I was hanging out. George had seen the watch—and so had I. But it didn't count. It had helped George's game a little, or it might have helped it—if I hadn't run into Maller. But now I had it straight and I knew that George had given it to me straight.

Then I was moving the joy-stick back a little, and we were in the air. We climbed steadily for a long time. Above seven thousand the D. H. handled a bit sluggishly. We didn't break any speed records getting up. But the other D. H. stuck near us. And we both went up in wide circles, sticking over the Field. We figured on pulling the jump there. The wind was from the north, and there was level country to the south. A two mile hop-off would be largely a matter of luck, when it came to landing, in any case.

AT TEN thousand, five hundred we called it quits. Forsom's D. H. made the last thousand slowly. Our ship could have done more. But we were up close enough to the two mile mark to let it go. We maneuvered for position, and Forsom got his ship off our right wing. The camera, bracketed and cranked by Fieldson in the rear cockpit, was focused in our direction. The camera man waved a handkerchief.

I jerked my head. George Criss was getting out on the right wing. His face was ghastly. Once he stopped, and it seemed to me seconds passed—ten or twenty of them, a long time in the air—before he made another move.

"He's quit!" I muttered to myself. "He's licked!"

But he wasn't. The next time I looked he was half-way out on the wing. We were up close to the clouds; once we roared through some trailing mists. Not thick, but spectacular. It would make good picture stuff.

Then George pulled a fall. He went to his knees, threw out one hand. It looked so real that I had a flashing thought he was going out. As he fell we had a cloud bump. That right wing came up sharply. I used right stick, and we got on even keel. Then I looked out on the wing.

George was lying near the tip, face downward. His head was close to a strut. He was motionless for a split second. Out of a corner of my eyes I saw Fieldson cranking the camera. Then we hit another bump. I got her on even keel again, jerked my head. Criss was gone!

I dove almost immediately. No hop-off man would let himself be slid off a wing-tip. George was out—and I could guess how. That bump had caught him kneeling on the wing, and had pitched him head-first against a strut. He had dropped flat—and the first bump, combined with the wind-pressure on that wing-surface had lifted him off!

I came out of the dive, went into a wide bank. I'd lost a thousand feet easily—and if George Criss was conscious he'd be *drifting*, not dropping now.

He was dropping. Just a plunging, black streak. I groaned as he flashed out of sight. Then I dove again. But I was sure that he was finished. Unconscious, he'd never be able to pull that rip-cord—

Then I saw it—the spread of white silk! I could almost hear it crackle in the sky. And below it dangled the figure of George Criss. The 'chute had opened!

Forsom had his ship down now; they were shooting the drifting of the parachute. I kept clear, out of the way. Then I saw another thing. George Criss's body was motionless. A dangling, inert form beneath that spread of white silk. Somehow, it wasn't natural. Acting? Or had the 'chute opened even while he was unconscious? I didn't know—but I wasn't taking any chances.

I figured about where Criss would land. Then I dove, with the engine half-open. A 'chute landing him at the rate of seventeen feet per second, normally, could finish him off pretty quick. He'd have no chance, if he *was* unconscious, to protect himself from a ground drag and battering.

I LANDED in a level field, and almost turned over in the attempt. But not quite. Then I was out of the front cockpit, running off to my left. I'd missed direction by a good eighth of a mile.

He came down just over the tops of some trees, and I held the little breath I had left until I saw that he was making it. Then I sprinted again. I was a good hundred yards off when he bit. Forsom's ship was sweeping down, and Fieldson was still cranking. They got the drag, all right.

Then they roared on. I came panting up—pulled to a staring halt. Out from the spread of collapsed silk rose the figure of George Criss! He was scratched badly about the face, his flying overalls were torn to shreds. But he was grinning.

"How'd it go, Mac?" he muttered thickly. "I let her bump me off—and didn't jerk her for a thousand or so. I nearly lost my nerve on that landing, though. Had to break the force of that drop a bit—then I let her drag me."

I stared. George Criss was still grinning. Suddenly he frowned.

"Guess you were right—about trying to get Maller," he said slowly. "Somehow I seem to have got some of the old fight back. And he isn't worth the trouble, at that."

I nodded. Then George smiled again. He extended a badly scraped right hand.

"The slip of paper, Mac!" He spoke in a steady, low voice. "It'll be all the same, I guess. Only—" he lowered his voice then, grinned broadly—"we'll *both* get it, this way."

I gave him the slip and my hand. I knew that James G. Stafford was right. They *do* come back, sometimes in spite of themselves. And sometimes it takes a two mile shoot to do the trick.

Concluding CAPTAIN DINGLE'S
Brutal Saga of the Sea

Flying Kestrel

Preceding events briefly told

Val Orson, a hard-fisted, man-killing driver of men and ships, brought the old clipper *Kestrel* into San Francisco, completing a record run for sailing ships across the Pacific. The crew had been driven so hard by Orson that on reaching port they all jumped ship, with one exception—the first mate, Martin.

Orson bought the old *Kestrel* when she was to be junked and refitted her in something of her former glory. The clipper is his one love, his dominating passion. Men, to him, are only slaves with which to work his ship, while women afford him but temporary pleasure. The milk of human kindness is not within him, his morality is that of an animal.

As is his custom, he had taken a woman with him on his last voyage, this time a little brown girl he captured in the Orient. On reaching port he turned her over to a missionary society, telling them she came aboard as a stowaway.

The clipper's cargo is discharged, she is reloaded with lumber and made ready for sea. Because of his unwholesome reputation as a driver and mankiller Orson has great difficulty in engaging a crew. He tricks his former first mate, Martin, into reshipping with him, hires a second mate and finally shanghaies aboard a crew of jailbirds and waterfront scum. During the days occupied by these details, Orson has been much ashore and seen a girl, Nancy Prouse, he wishes to take aboard with him. Orson, knowing she will not come willingly, lays plans and finally kidnaps her. Just as he is getting Nancy into the tender, to go aboard and set sail, he is attacked by a Greek sailor, a member of his former crew. With him is the little brown girl Orson had left at the mission. Orson over-powers the Greek, who tried to knife him, breaks his arm and throws him into the tender beside Nancy.

During the struggle the brown girl ran away and Orson pushes off for the *Kestrel*. Once on board he locks Nancy in his cabin, slips anchor and is away. They are followed by a police boat, but escape it in the fog. When they are well under way, Orson leaves the clipper in command of Martin and goes below to see Nancy. He finds her half out through a porthole and quickly drags her back inside.

Orson has the ex-parson read the marriage service for him and Nancy—not that he feels bound by it in any way but merely to make Nancy more submissive. She believes the ceremony to be genuine.

During the following weeks Orson lives up to his reputation as a driver, the *Kestrel* becomes a hell-ship, men stagger about her decks exhausted, but always kept at work by the hard-fisted skipper. When there is a breeze they are kept pumping night and day as the old *Kestrel* is "wide open" when driven hard under full sail. When becalmed Orson keeps them busy scraping paint, reservicing the gear, etc.—always work, no rest, and poor food. Finally they sight a smaller sailing ship and Orson declares he will stay on deck until they have left her astern.

For weary weeks the *Kestrel* has driven around the Horn, a rotting water-logged hulk, kept going only by her master's indomitable spirit. Food runs low, scurvy breaks out, ice and snow transform the ship to an Icelander's hell.

Orson kills the Greek who had again tried to knife him. No labor is too hard, no watch too long for Orson in his mad attempt to drive the old *Kestrel* to another record.

The crew growls and mutiny breeds.

CHAPTER XXI

ORSON'S LUCK

TWO mates who had long ago accepted the lordship of Val Orson, stood trick and trick at the helm while the *Kestrel's* master, apparently as invulnerable as ever to fatigue, kept watch without a break for rest through full thirty-six hours. Ice thickened the ship's bows until she carried a bow wave like a scow every time she dipped her figurehead. Added weight added to her burden. Overpressed aloft, she staggered forward with not a man to say she could not bear the load. Four hours after Orson sent the last able seaman away from the wheel, the gang at the pumping quit, in answer to a hail from somebody forward, and there was no relieving gang. Orson grinned coldly then, keeping in his memory the identity of that hailing voice.

He took a heavy revolver from his pilot coat pocket, twirling the cylinder as if estimating its efficiency. Then he suddenly called down the companionway to the steward to bring up a small-caliber high-power rifle he kept in his room. With his head inside the stairway, he was just a bit astonished to hear laughter, Nancy's laughter, and the steward's voice. The steward's voice ceased, as if cut off. Nancy's laugh was hushed too. Then the steward answered Orson's call and quickly appeared with the rifle.

"What's all the jollification about down there?" Orson demanded surlily. Nancy rarely laughed aloud like that for him. The steward looked frightened, and gulped. He knew Orson's moods by now.

"It was old Rogers, sir. Nancy—I mean Mrs. Orson, just made him take his vinegar, sir. I think he must be getting well."

"Maybe you'll get scurvy yourself, then see how damned funny it is. See that you prepare all the food for the cabin without having to go to the galley. If you lack anything, get it right now."

The steward went below and asked Mr. Martin if anything had happened to the cook. The mate bade him obey orders and leave other people's troubles to take care of themselves. Half an hour later the sharp crack of a rifle echoed through the cabins above all the racket of the charging ship, and Mr. Martin ran on deck, hastily pulling on his watch coat, jamming his hand midway in a sleeve because he tried to don the coat while holding an old bulldog pistol. Ringlin stood like a graven image at the helm, rimed with hoar frost.

Orson stood at the forward rail by the mizzenmast, and his rifle muzzle rested on the rail. To him Mr. Martin went, sure that the long sullen crew had at last broken bounds. Martin knew they'd do that. He could have told Orson that letting them get away with that jug of rum would prove to be the critical point. Orson gave no sign that he knew the mate was there beside him. Martin glanced forward. A man stood at the galley door, cursing the skipper, holding in his left hand a right hand that dripped blood. Coming aft from the forecastle were two more men, Tredway and Groves, and the little sea lawyer was saying many things.

"The lor sez—" he squealed. Much that he said was lost through his sputtering fury. But some was clear enough. "We signed on for lawful rations. You shot that pore bloke just becos he arsked fer our rightful food. You'll see, soon's we get ashore—"

Orson slowly raised the rifle until it covered Tredway.

"Those that work can eat," the skipper announced curtly. Tredway dodged behind Groves, his sputtering vituperation halted by the menace of the rifle. Groves, very drunk, waved one hand and addressed the poop generally.

"Men can not work like horses and eat like mice, Captain. I advise you to—"

Orson fired. The small, vicious bullet cracked through Groves' sou'wester crown, and the man jumped, turning white. Tredway ran like the little rat he was, and Groves dodged clear of another possible shot. The man who had first received a shot slunk forward as fast as he could.

"Men who behave like rats will work like horses and eat as I tell 'em in this ship," Orson promised, his voice rolling clear and incisive along the decks to where a little group of men hung about the forecastle doors loudly arguing.

Godwin and Norris had the floor. They seemed to be urging the rest to follow them aft. Until they won some response, it was impossible to know just how far aft they meant to go. Groves remained out of range, but his voice could be heard above the roar and thunder of sea and gale and cracking gear, asking what sort of men would let a shipmate get shot at and never make a move.

"LET Ringlin and me go down and put some life into them sir," growled Martin. Orson curtly bade him be still. Godwin started aft. Norris followed. Then Sails, and two more men. Until they reached the main pumps Orson stood as tense as if frozen, his finger on the trigger. But there was no attack. The men stopped at the pumps, and stolidly began to grind away at the dreary task of catching up on the water that had been allowed to gain.

"One of you men send the cook to me," Orson ordered then. And when the doctor arrived, looking as if he too had shared in the stolen rum, he was briefly told to serve no food to any man who had not first put in a spell at the pumps. To make sure he would obey, Orson ordered the steward to issue only rations enough for those men now pumping.

"If I refuse them men food, then try to go for'ard to my bunk, they'll corpse me, Cap'n," the doctor grumbled.

"Sleep in your galley, and lock yourself in. If you do give 'em food, except as I order, I'll corpse you myself. Write your own certificate."

The men at the pumps did their two hours' spell, and went to the galley for their meat and biscuit. There was no relieving gang. The water would simply gain until the pumps were manned again. Norris went to the poop ladder.

"Captain, some of us are doing our duty, as we signed to do. It isn't fair to make us do the pumping for all hands, not meaning to speak disrespectful," he said.

"I'm not missing anything, my lad," Orson returned. "Tell Chips to sound the well and bring me the sounding."

Norris returned to his mates, grumbling. Godwin found heart to grin. Every day since they joined the ship they had found some new phase to Orson's complex character. They expected to see Val Orson come storming along when his crew refused duty, to clean the whole bunch neck and crop out single-handed. Chips stood in his half-open doorway, chalking his jointed rod, cursing his delinquent gang who ought then to be at the pumps. Alone, neither Chips nor the bosun could do anything; and neither of them could persuade another man to turn out. Standing there, the carpenter could hear the men's angry voices arguing the point. There were

Tredway and Groves, and the man who had been shot in the hand; and a medley of others, all seemingly in some hot dispute. Then a man came out and told Chips he was ready to go to work. Chips growled back, and went along to the midship sounding pipe, the man following. And when the sounding was taken aft, the sailor hung to Chips still.

"Water's gaining over the best the pumps can do, sir," Chips reported. "Take some sail off her and maybe—"

"She'll carry sail until it blows off," snapped Orson. "Tell the men if they won't pump they'll not only not eat, but I'll sail the ship under and drown 'em in their holes like the rats they are."

"I'm ready to work, Cap'n. I never quit. They wouldn't let me out," the solitary sailor said.

"Join the gang that will work, then," was the retort.

THE men sulked forward. The wind whipped seas aboard, until the entire ship forward of the waist was a cold, bitter, dripping thing of horror to hungry men. And as the rum died in them hunger became a real thing. Godwin and Norris argued long and stubbornly. They manhandled a man or two before they got through; and others who had gone to work with them last spell bragged about the effect of a full belly on a cold but willing sailorman. Still Tredway counseled fight. Groves had cunningly kept back a little rum, sufficient to stiffen his own courage and keep the little sea lawyer's tongue well greased. It was time for the working gang to go back to the pumps again, and old Sails was stepping out, when with a crack and a roar the mainroyal burst at last, and the ship vibrated to the uttermost fastening under the terrific threshing.

"Get that sail secured!" roared Orson, the emergency making him forget that he had for the time being no crew. The mate was about to relieve Ringlin at the helm; he too leaped forward, bawling orders. At the foot of the mainmast Martin realized the extent of the trouble. He turned and roared aft:

"The yard's snapped, sir! Lose the mast in a minute!"

Regardless of the men, and how they might receive him, Mr. Martin plunged right into the forecastle, bursting through the little gang around Sails and bellowed.

"Now m' sons! There's a fine job for half a dozen sailors! Come on you, and you—" The mate grabbed man after man, and the rest could only stare. Out on deck Norris and half of the pumping gang were at the main rigging to windward. Godwin and Sails were at the pumps, undecided. At them Mr. Martin yelled:

"You men carry on pumping unless you want the ship to go from under you! Come on, you brave lads!" Again he had to grab men one by one, for the malingerers he had bustled from the forecastle were already inclined to return.

"Yuh wooden men! What's th' use o' wreckin' th' bloody ship out o' spite? Ain't yuh goin' with her if she goes?" shrieked Chips, and the man who had followed him aft added his bit above the stupendous din of the threshing sail and battering royal yard.

"Knock that parson and 'is lawyer over the 'ead, and turn to! They're wise, they are. Kiddin' you to get drowned as well as starved to death!"

Men seemed to drift from nowhere. Only the voices of Groves and Tredway in the forecastle might be heard still wordily holding forth. The royal yard had snapped, as the mate guessed, and one yardarm flogged hellishly aloft there only held by the earring of the sail, the lift, and the brace, with a wide sphere of evil influence at the command of its giddily gyrating flail. The other part, still held to the slender royal mast by the parral, jerked violently to the threshing of the broken end; and the parting of robands could be heard from the deck as they tore out one by one between eyelets and jackstay.

When the halyards were let go, and that part of the yard which was partly retained by the parral was secured by clewing down, the mate led unwilling men aloft to muzzle the fighting fiend up there in the freezing gale. Even Orson did not roar an order to mend and set the sail again. He did not bellow to Chips to start fitting a new royal yard.

AFTER two hours of terrific endurance aloft, the men came down, and Mr. Martin helped aft a man whose knee was crushed to a red pulp, other men followed, sure that their obedience in emergency must receive reward.

"Tell the steward to bring me a glass of rum," Orson told the mate after a glance at the wounded knee. Men crowded the poop ladder hopefully; yet that one glass of rum was not going far. It was brought, and the steward remained, shivering in the biting cold. Orson slowly poured the strong spirit over the crushed flesh, holding the ankle meanwhile in an iron grip.

"Wrap it up," he told the steward briefly, and the sailor was helped by the steward into the warmth and glow of the cabin.

"That'll do. You can lay for'ard," Orson snapped at the waiting men. Then one of them stepped out.

"Captain," he stuttered, blue with cold, and shaking with exhaustion, "we done our job, on em'ty stummicks, sir. Wuzn't easy, neither. Mister Martin knows that. Respeckfully, sir, we asks our rations."

"Rations are issued for men who work ship. You'll get your whacks, all hands, when all hands keep the pumps manned. I don't care a whoop what you choose to do aloft to keep yourselves warm. That'll do, men. Lay for'ard."

Dumbly the men obeyed. And dumbly the mates watched. The ship roared into icy seas, and her skipper might have been one of her icicles. But when the pumping spell was done, and another one-third of the crew were due on deck, that new gang appeared, sullen and muttering, but they took up the pumping and kept it going, damning the soul of Orson, perhaps, promising him reprisal and themselves vengeance; but carrying on with the job because one man, all alone in a world of bitterness, was able to be a bit more bitter than they.

And so with the next gang, and those after. Orson did condescend to unbend once. He curtly told the second mate to fetch aft six men, and named them, each to receive one hooker of rum, to be drunk on the poop; and four of those six men were to do all the steering thenceforth. No other man was to be permitted to touch the wheel. But, that order carried out, and one of the men at the helm, with the proper officer keeping the deck, Val Orson went straight to the chart-room. He might have been excused had he gone to his bed. But no. He called for the log reading, then went to his chart, his books, his log book, and spent an hour tracing the track of the *Kestrel* up to the minute; then compared the result with those old, old records he almost treated as gods.

The six men treated to rum went forward, or all but that one now at the wheel, to tell disgruntled men what was to be gained by loyalty, what to be lost by listening to such mentors as Tredway and Groves. They did not receive unanimous applause; there were Tredway, Groves, the wounded man, and one or two more, who kept trouble a-bubbling. But, mostly, men who were hungry were more receptive to argument promising food than to that which promised only revenge.

The mates, keeping their watches, talked briefly when relieving each other. They had tasted the rigors of keeping a wheel during all their time on deck. They had seen the ship forced beyond her endurance. They had seen men weaken and fail. More, they had seen a promising mutiny nipped in the bud by such methods as they had never hoped to see Val Orson put into use. Through it all, and now to a vaster degree, Orson kept right on comparing his ship's run with the best of other ships of palmier days of sail. Four hours after he might have retired to his bed and Nancy, Val Orson finished a long calculation and stepped out on deck. He raised his head, sniffed the air, and announced shortly to both mates, then in act of relieving each other:

"By dead reckoning, the ship is not far behind where she ought to be. The sky's going to clear. Call me as soon as a star comes through."

He went below. Ringlin watched him go, then shrugged his husky young shoulders.

"Still thinking he can beat records! He's darned lucky he's got a man willing to pull a rope, or an officer willing to stand by him!"

Mr. Martin shrugged too.

"Man, he'll break a record if ever man can do it. Lucky? Sure he's lucky. It's Orson's luck, my son, Orson's luck."

CHAPTER XXII

BLUER SKIES

OLD Rogers was not getting well. He died on the very day that the bitter cold turned to milder airs; the day when for the first time in a month the seas ran with a sibilant whisper instead of a venemous hiss. Seas were still green-gray. Skies had not yet that warmth of blue so impatiently watched for. Winds still blew hard and true from the south pole; but the sun rose higher each noon, snow was no longer a savage thing to curse, but a softly falling, fading thing like the wraith of a repentant, gentle sinner. Old Rogers died on a day which broke bright and almost blue. Nancy's eyes were mistily sad as she told Orson.

"I did my best, Val, truly I did," she said. And, as if some devil within the man were ever goading him to appear brutal before Nancy, Orson retorted:

"I've heard of nurses in hospitals having a good time with young sawbones while patients died next door. I suppose you and that damned steward were playing hospital, hey? Tell the mate to have Chips sew the old stiff up and make ready to give him a passage."

And while old Rogers' funeral was being got ready, Orson had the two injured men in the forecastle brought aft and put into the cabin old Rogers had occupied. The man with the crushed knee was lifted into the bunk where Rogers died before the last impress of the old sailor's body was out of the mattress.

Men who had been ready to kill Orson a few days before now argued hotly in his favor.

"Ain't he treatin' them fellers right?"

"Did y' ever see Jack Mucks took aft for nursin' in a windbag afore?"

Thus went the chatter. Groves, having received orders to read the service over old Rogers, believed that he had been forgiven; that rum was to be his reward again. He added his word:

"After all, men, we signed on to do our duty. The captain was right to punish disobedience. He is not a bad man."

"Yus, y' bleedin' welcher!" Tredway howled. "'Oo wos it as started disobedience? 'Oo stole the rum wot put thoughts into men's 'eads?"

"Hush, little man," Groves said soothingly. "Who knows but there may be rum again? Spare your breath, laddie, spare your breath."

THERE was a change in the erstwhile preacher when he came in after the funeral. With careful attention to detail he had made an attempt to impress Orson with his utter willingness to let bygones be bygones. He read, or recited, the short portion of the burial service he could remember, with much unction, glancing often sideways at Nancy standing at the poop rail, casting an occasional eye at Orson when rolling out his most impressive numbers. And when it was all over, and there should have been rum, there was no rum.

"Tredway, you were right. Orson's a swine. I must have been crazy to ever think he was a man." Groves railed savagely while ripping off his imitation clerical garb.

"Hell, yer both crazy!" growled the sailor who rarely said much. "Get out and take a snifter o' good fresh air, then you won't feel so bad." The blue in the sky was at work in unsuspected breasts.

Other men were discussing Val Orson. Godwin and Norris, the good friends of many a voyage together, found it impossible to agree in this case.

"What's Orson ever shown us, barrin' bluff?" Norris wanted to be told.

"Did he bluff the Greek?" Godwin returned. "Didn't he handle all hands without fuss when they refused to pump?"

"He had the Greek's number. That was easy. But don't you get the notion it was Orson who made the men turn to. Hunger and accident that was, and his blasted gun." Norris was unconvinced. Godwin laughed.

"Well, I'm satisfied. Orson isn't quite the manhandling bucko I expected, but he gets results, and when it's necessary to crack a man in two he does it without any mistake. Besides, he's got some good in him. Look how he took care of Rogers 'til the old josser slipped his cable. And how about taking Tom and Ike aft? Makes no difference that one got shot for sassing him and the other got hurt doin' his job sailor fashion. They're hurt, and need care, so aft he takes 'em and let's Nancy give it to 'em."

"You're as crazy as Tredway!" growled Norris surlily. "I was aft on the logline when he broached that question. He had old Rogers aft because he wanted all hands able to sweat their guts out on his —— —— old hooker, and scurvy spreads. And he told the mate his woman was too blasted happy, and the steward was too —— well fed and lazy; to fetch aft them two men so's there'd be work for the steward and the woman. Care? Val Orson wouldn't care a squirt in hell if all hands were dyin' o' plague, so long as his rotten old ship was flying. The cold had got to Ike's shot hand and Tom's mashed knee. If he'd left 'em for'ard they'd damn soon have croaked, and while they were croaking another bloke 'ud have to look after 'em. Orson's a cold-blooded lump o' hellish tripe, and I'm goin' to brace him sharp up one day."

"It'll have to be soon," grinned Godwin. "Now the weather's broke, all hands don't feel so sour. And the old hooker's making time, too."

"Don't you make any mistake," Norris retorted. "He's a long way from busting records up to now. What's got into you, anyhow? First off you were so darned eager to bust him in the kisser just because of that soft-headed floosey. Now look at you!"

Godwin grinned again. He turned Norris around, facing aft. Nancy was on the poop, bareheaded to the brisk wind, her hair all wild and her face alight. Orson paced the deck to windward, and gave no look to Nancy, but there was no mistaking Nancy's look.

"There's the reason," Godwin said. "If that girl isn't well content, I'm a salt herring. What damned fool 'ud try to horn in there?"

THERE was a lot of truth in Godwin's notion. Nancy just then glowed with sober contentment. After the weeks of grim storm just passed, with the inevitable darkness of human spirit matching the bitter weather, she felt much like a bird suddenly released into sunshine after imprisonment in a dark, cold cage.

Old Rogers had not been a pleasant patient toward the last. Scurvy patients can not be pleasant. And Rogers was very old, and very helpless. The two new patients were far less trying. There was little the matter with them in a bodily way except their wounds, and they were much more terrible to look at than they were actually. After the first cleansing with creso, and bandaging, Nancy didn't mind looking at the wounds at all. She was glad to have them aft. Orson had little time for her lately, and days were so long and lonely without something to do. She had finished her sewing, and the improvised hospital gave her a hobby. More than that, it gave her one more peg on which to hang her rather pitiful faith in Orson's humanity.

She wanted to believe that his harshness, his brutality, were a pose. His hardness toward her was always more displayed verbally, or even negatively, than physically. He had rarely hurt her, except in the way of rough caress, which she had grown rather to long for even while cringing from the sting. His words sometimes hurt her cruelly; particularly when he enlarged upon some bygone light o' love's especial trick of love-making, perhaps forcing her to look upon the light o' love's picture the while.

But now she felt sure he was her man, that she had won him from all lights o' love forevermore. And feeling that way toward him, it gave her a warm little thrill to think that he, Val Orson the man-killer, the abductor of women; who laughed when they stabbed him, ridiculed their threats of self-destruction and made them love him in the end; he was the same man who could shoot a sailor coldly, without rage, and put that sailor into the comfort of the cabin and let her be nurse to him; making no distinction between that man and the other who had been hurt while doing his duty.

She hugged herself as she stood there, taking the first fresh airing she had been able to have for a long time. True, he took no more notice of her than if she had been a bollard or a timber-head. He was much too engrossed in watching the ship, and the weather signs.

Chips was mending the broken yard. There were no more spares in the ship. The yard was being fished; spliced by putting the jagged ends together, mortising twelve-foot pieces of strong pine into both parts all around the circumference, and tightly serving the splice with wire rope after the whole had been fastened with inset spikes and the holes dowelled. Sails was mending the split royal. Bosun and two hands spliced and served anew the broken or spread ends of braces, lifts, and sheets ready to fit. Watching it all Orson seemed nervous, yet pleased. Straight from the south'ard came the wind, and it sang as lustily as it once roared. It gave the *Kestrel* just that slant which brought her yards clear of the backstays, stretched every yard of canvas to cracking point, and made every 'tween-mast staysail pull like a dragoon. The blue overhead was just made bluer by scudding tufts of white cloud. The sea that leaped and thundered before the flying clipper was rapidly taking on the deeper green which soon would turn to blue.

The *Kestrel* labored less, yet sailed as fast, lacking the opposition of the grimmer, heavier seas. Men worked at the pumps, but their labor was growing lighter, too, as the ship's grew lighter.

THE *Kestrel* was still flying at that record which filled her master's brain sleeping and waking. And the aim was not beyond her power of flight.

Nancy went below, and set to work making a supper such as had not been eaten in the saloon for many days. She wanted to see the long table dressed again. The steward had told her how real the provision shortage was; and she had puzzled her head for ways of eking out things to make a showing as well as to fill a need. And there were little flowers of silken scraps and wire which she had made. If the ship would only stay still long enough for a meal to be eaten, she could make the table look pretty. But the ship would not keep still. That silent, grim figure above saw to it that she could not. Yet she so wanted to make a display this evening. It seemed as if her mood and that of the reviving weather were utterly in sympathy.

"What can you suggest for supper?" she asked the steward. They had just finished attending to the hospital inmates. The steward shrugged and grinned.

"Hash and dried-apple stew, I s'pose," he replied. She too shrugged. It was so obviously the only possible reply. But she would rise above it. There was flour in the ship. A bit moldy, sour, crawling with weevils, but capable, when dried over a spirit stove so that the weevils vacated it for cooler quarters and the sourness was modified with the damp, of being converted into pastry of sorts.

"Open a tin of lard," she said, "and bring up a sifter of flour."

"It's the only tin o' lard left, I told you."

"Never mind. I want it. This evening of all evenings I'll cut a dash. Dry the flour. Then get out a tablecloth. I'm going to set the table for a party."

"Damned if the whole ship ain't gone mad!" the steward muttered, but grinned too as he dropped through the lazaret hatch.

Nancy made a paste of flour and water with lard and salt. Of the hash she made savory pasties. Of the dried apples a big pie. She set the table, and the steward fixed the fiddles, tying to four of the center intersections of the mahogany racks glass flower vases long in disuse. While supper was cooking in the pantry, Nancy sat on the floor of her room, hurriedly making up posies of her artificial flowers, and singing happily, unconsciously, loudly.

"Now what in hell's started you off again?"

She started, turned, half rose, scattering the floor with flowers, her singing stopped, her face all rosy and shy, to see Orson staring alternately at the saloon table with a sort of whimsical contempt, and at her with very honest astonishment.

CHAPTER XXIII

NANCY'S HAPPINESS

THAT supper was a mixture of success and failure. Every eye that fell upon the prettily set table lighted up for a moment with long-dormant interest in the nicer things of life. Orson ate two pieces of pie, and made no other comment; but that was sufficient for Nancy. If he only would not have stared at her so queerly. She grew uncomfortable. All the brightness faded from her face, and a wistfulness settled there. She sat through the meal while one mate relieved the other, serving all from her own proper place at the table foot, and trying to be bright. But Orson's gaze never left her face; and when the meal was over, and Nancy went to her room, Orson followed her, and shut the door behind him.

"Did you like the supper, Val?" she asked, timidly eager.

He gripped her arm, pulling her before him with a fierce twist, and as her eyes met his squarely she shivered.

"Why—what— You're hurting me, Val," she stammered.

"I'm likely to hurt you so you'll know it," he laughed unpleasantly. "Tell me what's all the celebration about. Come on. What's it all about?"

"What do you mean? The table laid again? I try to make the place cheerful as well as I can. I can't do very much, but—"

Orson was looking down at her much as

he once looked at the men along his rifle. His lips curled, and he tightened his grip on her arm, her eyes darkening with fear and bewilderment.

"Don't try to fool me! A couple o' times lately I caught you singing when God knows there was damned little to sing about. You ain't singing for me, girl. You stop as soon as I get within hearing. And you were laughing and skylarking with the steward a while ago—"

"Oh, Val! Do you know what you're saying?" Nancy cried vehemently, even her simple soul wise enough to follow his meaning. "I sing when I'm alone, because I'm happy. I don't often laugh, Val. You stay away from me too much."

"And you fill my place with the steward, a damned flunkey?"

"That's not true! It's wicked to say that, when you know it's not true. I'm your woman, and well you made sure of it. What man would want to, if he dared to, flirt with me in your ship? It's wicked, and untrue, and, and— Oh, just silly!" she cried, and all the warm color came surging back into her face. Her eyes, for that one angry moment all alight with indignation, softened until they only glowed shyly up at him.

"You don't laugh much, but you sing when you're alone because you're happy, eh?" he mocked. "But you laugh with the steward and you stop singing when I come nigh you. Well, my lass, just you keep on thinking you're my woman, and don't ever begin to forget it. And you'll sing for me same as for others. You'll laugh for me, too, or by God I'll show you a few tricks that'll make you wish you could laugh. Get out some night gear for me. I'm going to turn in for once."

"I think a sleep will do you good, Val. You've been under a strain. It's made you irritable and unfair." Nancy put out his clean pajamas, punched the pillow, and went out humming softly to look at the two sick sailors. Orson's dark eyes flashed; but he repressed the impulse to answer her, and as he rolled into bed he chuckled to think that she had shown so much spirit. As for Nancy, she stepped a little more proudly, and her face wore a more mature dignity, because Val Orson had shown her unmistakably that he could be jealous. It gave her a sense of importance she had only secretly hoped for until then.

VAL ORSON was scarcely the man to start something and not finish it. He awoke after a deep sleep in a fresh, clean bed, full of his own tremendous vitality. It was the first time in weeks that he had permitted himself the luxury of real sleep in absolute relaxation. His ship lagged just barely behind the schedule she must maintain in order to wipe that old record from the books forever. She was sailing as fast as human ingenuity and man power could make her; and as the weather grew milder, though she sailed as fast as before, she leaked less because the seas were less. But she did leak; tremendously; in any other ship the boats would long ago have been overhauled in readiness; but after the bitter experience south of the Horn the leakage seemed trivial to the pump-hardened crew. Orson knew that, if ever he were destined to set up that new record to live for all time, it must be at the expense of incessant vigilance, and it might easily be at the expense of the life of the ship itself; for he scarcely hoped the old *Kestrel* would be much good after the terrific wracking he had put her through.

Thus, only by incessant watching, he might hope to pick up that much mileage day by day as would give him a margin of time in case the winds fell light toward the end and no longer thrust the heavily laden old clipper through the seas as she ought to go. To be free on deck, he must be secure below, and to that end he told the steward a few homely truths which put that not overbold individual into a trembling fit that lasted until Orson had left him some time.

Judging by the tremendous activity that immediately began down in the storeroom, Orson had given the steward work enough to do to keep him out of mischief. As for the steward, about the last thing on earth he had ever thought of was being unduly familiar with his skipper's woman. But the sourest dose was Nancy's; for she was compelled to hear every word said to the steward, and her ears burned as she went almost blindly about her morning duties.

Nevertheless, when Orson came below for the next meal, and went to his room to wash his hands, he surprised Nancy again, softly singing. She stopped at once, and blushed, but otherwise carried on to finish her job of tidying up the stateroom. Orson said nothing to her; but when he went to take his place at the table he closed the door behind him, then stood, listening. The mate stood by his own chair, waiting for the captain to seat himself, and if any thought other than of ship's business entered the head of decent Ken Martin, there was no sign of it. He did not even look at Orson, standing there, head bent downward, at the closed door of the stateroom he had just left. But Orson was not there long. He heard Nancy take up her song again; and he got to his seat and turned the chair just as she opened the door and came out to her own place. Nothing was said by either.

That was one of the ship's banian days. A banian day at sea is a meatless day. Such had long been the fashion aboard the *Kestrel*, once a week. Commonly, in well found deepwater ships, banian days only came at the fag-end of a long passage. Men expected them, when a passage had been overlong. But the *Kestrel* was within a few days of having made a record passage to date. The only thing that kept the men from rebelling was the very plain fact that the cabin fared no better, so far as material was concerned; and the thoughtful issue of grog on those days.

The cabin meal consisted of biscuits, made from moldy flour, tinned butter that would soon require to be spread with a brush, thick pea soup, and more dried apples pulped into mash and called sauce. The forecastle had the same materials, but the doctor could never do as well with them as Nancy and the steward did for the cabin.

Since their first attempt to stick up for their rights in the matter of food, however, the men had not complained, since Orson was absolutely honest about the sharing of the stores. He had skimped the stores to pay wages for men enough to drive his ship; and he shared in the shortage when it came.

There was now, or seemed to be, sounds of voices on the main deck near to the forward cabin doors, which were under the half spiral poop ladders and had not yet been opened since the bad weather. Access was had to and from the poop by way of the deckhouse companionway. Orson looked up at the sound, and the steward shifted uneasily in his pantry.

"What's the row out there, steward?" Orson wanted to know.

"I don't know, sir," the steward said, unconvincingly.

"Find out!"

The man ran. Orson's eyes followed him out, then Mr. Martin volunteered:

"No doubt it's the rum, sir. No rum today."

"Rum? Rum is it?" Orson almost stuttered with rage. "Didn't the swine steal enough rum to have lasted a week? I'll give 'em rum."

THE steward returned, looking frightened. Mr. Ringlin's lusty voice was heard ordering somebody for'ard. Orson glared a question at the steward.

"The rum's all gone, Captain, and the men are growling because there's none for banian day. I have the stores list. Was going to show it to you after dinner. Here it is."

Orson glanced down the pitiful inventory of stores remaining, and for once his brow seemed to wrinkle with concern. He glanced at the table, so sparsely spread; and furtively at Nancy, so bravely uncomplaining. On deck other men could be heard now, howling back at Ringlin.

"Can't you do anything at all with that cask of spoiled beef?" Orson demanded.

"It's very bad, sir. Ought to go overboard. It 'd kill rats. I found one in the barrel, dead. Stinks, it do."

"Last barrel of pork broached? Rum all gone? All right! From now on, all banian days except Sunday, understand? I'll go and see what the hands are bawling for."

Mr. Martin got up as soon as Orson left the table, and went on deck to relieve Ringlin; Orson had picked up his pistol from his desk before going on deck, and Martin followed the good example. At the poop ladders the watch then supposed to be eating dinner had all congregated. Ringlin stopped arguing with them when Orson arrived, and the argument on the men's side noticeably lessened.

"What's the trouble, men? Out with it," snapped Orson in no soft mood.

"We wants our rum, sir, banian day."

"Quite right, men. Right enough," Orson replied, evenly. His eyes were seeking out faces in the little mob. He noticed neither Groves nor Tredway among them. The gang was led by a man who usually did his work faultlessly, and had nothing to say. At the pumps a small gang just kept the wheel turning, and a dribble of water from the lip scarcely wetted their boots. They were obviously marking time, making as little racket with the pump gear as possible, in order to hear the proceedings aft.

"Thank ye, sir, and maybe the stooard—" the sailor proceeded hopefully. Orson held up his hand, and his face was hard and grim.

"Listen to me, you men. There is no rum. There is none in the ship, for me or for you. One of you stole a full jug out of the storeroom, and all hands had a hell of a good time on it while it lasted. Issued by the steward, that would have been a full week's allowance. You'd still be getting rum on banian days. And, wait a minute, my lads, listen to this: there will be a banian day six days a week now, straight along. Get that? Every day but Sunday a banian day, and no rum. Sundays you'll get a half whack of pork as long as it lasts. Now go for'ard and take it out on the man who stole that rum. Lay for'ard!"

Mr. Martin kept his hand in his pocket, and his fingers on his gun. Ringlin stood behind the skipper, ready to stop a rush with his hands. Orson stood there at the ladder head, cold and sinister, staring down every eye that dared face him. And the men turned. They growled fiercely, they swore, but when they moved it was toward the forecastle, and the names most to be heard on their lips as they went were the names of Groves and Tredway.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALL BANIAN DAYS

HOW far the men went by way of "taking it out on the man who stole the rum" might be in doubt; but Groves relieved his opposite number at the pump wearing a purple eye, and Tredway spat blood along with his curses as he, too, went to the pumps. The curses were aimed at Groves, queerly enough, but the little guttersnipe sea lawyer took care to edge into a place as far from Groves as possible. And Groves made no answer to his old crony. The once reverend gentleman said nothing to anybody noticeably; but he indulged in the silent speech of the eye, and if a purple eye can be matched by thoughts of the same hue, that was the hue of his thoughts as he glanced often at the various figures from time to time on the poop.

Those were days of quiet. Sometimes a vast quiet covers the sea before a fierce outburst of storm. Yet the men appeared to be far from meditating any further rebellion, mild or fierce, against the master of the *Kestrel*. There seemed little they could hope to do. So far as working the ship was concerned, all hands knew that was inevitable. There was Orson, standing watch night and day when he might have been taking his ease. He watched the ship and her steering, her trim and the progress of the leak, as if he still had a chance of making a record and establishing his vessel once for all as a big money maker. Everybody knew that a record was very much to be doubted now. The ship slipped a bit behind every day since the winds had softened and the logs in the hold had soaked up so much water. And as for making money afterward, even Orson must know that the days of the wind-jammer was past.

Not enough sailing ships were left for a record passage to make any difference in getting freights. Besides which, if the ancient *Kestrel* ever reached port with her present cargo intact, it was rather more than likely she would never get another charter, for she was wracked almost to pieces now. But whatever his idea might be, Val Orson was bound to set up a new record for his old hooker, and that was all the men need know. He saw to it that they did their part, as he did his. He had paid them wages for just that thing.

And since the sun grew warmer daily, and the breeze remained fair, the first week of all banian days produced nothing more ominous than a deeper run of growling every time the messkids went forward. Whenever a man felt like blowing off steam, there were Groves and Tredway to act as human safety valves. When six days of meatless meals seemed just about the limit beyond which the men would not go, along came the seventh day and pork, with moldy flour duff, to satisfy in part the gnawing of hungry bellies and stop loose mouths. Orson knew crews, oh, very well indeed! On the Sunday when the pork went forward, he also sent half a plug of tobacco for each man, without saying a word of stopping the cost from the account of wages. He had seen hard driven crews ready to fall upon their taskmasters when all the tobacco was gone, though as long as there was a smoke or a quid to solace them they would work and endure like heroes. He sent this tobacco out of his own store;

and he knew how small that store had become.

Men actually began to defend him: mostly on Sundays.

"Yus, you go arft and kiss him!" Tredway spat out. "Short memories some blokes got."

"Hush, laddie," Groves soothed him. "The ship's a long way from home yet."

"Go sit in the tar!" Tredway told him, with a curse.

BUT the old cronies were drawing together again. Both were under a cloud forward: both needed fellowship; each found the sort of fellowship most congenial in the other. And after a week or two of living with men, sharing the grind of pumping out an old wooden ship, eating from the same short whack rations, other men who had temporarily forsaken the pair of stormy petrels in anger gradually came back into the fold of common intercourse. That, too, seemed inevitable. No use always crying over spilt milk; or rum that was stolen and had been drunk. After all, Groves shared that rum out very matey.

A fair fresh gale hopped on to the tail of the *Kestrel* when in mid-south-Atlantic, and hounded her north in a smother of white foam on a sea as blue as the heart of a summer sky. The pumping increased. There was endless pully-hauling on gear that could be stretched no tighter. Always the handy-billy to the halyards and sheets. Yards almost squared, head-sails nearly becalmed, bows driving deep in roaring swells that ran ahead but never eluded the swoop of the soaring *Kestrel*. And Val Orson pacing the poop like the master of a first-chop tea clipper on the last ten leagues of a premium tea race.

"Heave the log, Mister!" That was the hourly order. No matter that the patent taffrail log was ever trailing and recording. Orson knew enough not to trust the patent gadget after months of use at sea, when there was the old, tried, proved ship's log and reel for a man to compare with. And then when the daily run was worked up by most carefully checked "fixes," and compared with the account by log and compass, with what intensity did Val Orson bring up his log to date and place alongside of it that old sailing record he had bound himself to beat.

"Flow the fore-sheets an inch or two, Mister." That was likely to ring in the ears of the mate on watch. "A fores'l should lift her, not bury her!"

VAL ORSON, in all his years at sea, had never commanded a first-rate clipper in her prime. He had been mate or second mate perhaps of a ship with a name; but he had always nursed, secretly, an ambition which, with the years going at speed, seemed certain to elude him. When he bought the old *Kestrel*, long past her day, the day of sail was about as far gone as she. At first it had taken all his energy, all his fighting soul, to get a cargo of any sort for his ship, and it had been harder still to get mates and men for that sort of haphazard cargo. But when he drove his ship across the Pacific to learn that he had broken a record of thirty years' standing, ambition had once more sprung to life in his breast, and this flight of the *Kestrel*, which he knew, better than anybody else, was likely to prove the final flight of a bird with broken pinions, was bound to be flown at the peak of endurance for timber, hemp, iron, cotton, human flesh and blood. And, stinting nothing in flesh and blood, Val Orson gave of his own unstintedly.

The splendid progress of the ship reacted on men who had just about been ready to listen to whispers of devious import again.

"You're letting the water gain on the pumps again, Mister," Orson snapped one afternoon when his reckoning failed to satisfy him. And young Mr. Ringlin, growing more and more in admiration of the old ship and the cold, grim man driving her; enthusing now because, whereas before he saw nothing but the callous driving of hopeless men in a hopeless endeavor, he saw now a chance, a real chance, of going home second mate of a record breaking clipper: Mr. Ringlin sent his lusty young hail along the maindeck and the gang ground the handles around more briskly. They could even raise a song unchallenged:

"Mizzouri she's a mighty river,
A-away yo' rolling river!
Mizzouri she's a mighty river
Ho-ho, we're bound away—
'Cross the wide Mizzouri.

Ho, Shanadore I love your daughter,
A-way yo' rolling river!
For her I've crossed the stormy water
Ho-ho, we're bound away—
'Cross the wide Mizzouri."

All through the bright, breezy days when the ship foamed for her port and the sunlight danced about her, Nancy spent long hours on deck just soaking in warmth and brightness. True, Orson gave her scant attention. There were little circles about her eyes which hinted that she might not be as happy as she bravely tried to appear. But she smiled, and her eyes glowed, and when her man came within her view she seemed to react to his presence in a manner that ought to have gratified a man who felt interested at all. Once he stumbled, the ship suddenly lurching as he balanced trying to get an observation with his sextant; and Nancy uttered a little cry, half rising from her seat as if to run and catch him. He recovered, seamanlike, never taking the sextant from his eye, and never knew that anybody, much less Nancy, had noticed him stumble or cared either. Only young Ringlin, and the helmsman, had noticed the little incident, and both grinned until one saw the other, then the helmsman's grin changed to intense regard for the course.

ONE morning the steward brought a report to Orson. That same day the order went forth that banian days would be seven days a week. The pork was finished. There was still a very little old salt hake, which required sharp hunger to sauce it into edibility. That was served to the men on Sunday, instead of the usual half ration of pork. Sunday afternoon there was a sort of mass meeting in the forecastle; and Messrs. Groves and Tredway came suddenly back into favor.

"Stinkin' fish! And a lousy arf portion! D'ye fink they eat this muck aft?" Tredway was in great form. "Ain't they holdin' grub back on us? Mark my words, it's only us blokes as is keepin' th' bleedin' 'ooker afloat wiv pumpin', and he knows it. Them aft is keepin' perwisions enough to grub the boats if she starts to founder, then we'll get left to save ourselves while him and 'is floosey starts orf in the longboat wiv all the grub."

"Don't speak so of the captain, laddie," Groves chided softly. He watched the faces around him. The forecastle was shot with sunlight, and faces were expressive. Jaws ground away on tobacco; the sunlight was writhing with spirals of smoke; but the atmosphere of the gathering was independent of smoke or sunlight. Coming in from the bright outdoors the clank of the pumps maintained its harsh note against all the softer complaint of straining gear, the clacking of chain sheets, the slow, steady clang of wash ports on either side as the ship rolled down the wind. That harsh clank of pumps had been with them now for many weeks. Full fed and happy, they might have endured even that; but there had been little happiness aboard the *Kestrel*. Full fed they had never been, and starvation perched on the trucks already.

"There can not be food aft, laddie," Groves went on, talking to Tredway as if nobody else was there. "Look at Nancy's eyes next time you're near enough. There's hunger there, and pain. I wish I had shipped with a crew of men who were men. I grieve to see that young girl slowly dying at the whim of a brute. But do not speak ill of your captain, laddie. Not that."

"You go to 'ell!" grumbled Tredway, and rolled into his bunk.

Still days sped by, and still the ship sped north; but the winds died to mild breezes, to airs, to zephyrs. Once the *Kestrel* gained to a position where another good day's work would put her ahead of the record. That day the salt fish was ended. Orson scarcely noticed the effect on the men, though it was Sunday, and no fish meant simply that the seven Banian days a week would be absolute and without the poor amelioration of bad fish.

"I'M KEEPING my gun on me, Ringlin, better get yours," the mate said when the deck was relieved. Ringlin silently followed the advice. One glance at Orson warned both officers that, so far as he was concerned, the crew might as well be off the earth; his mind was centered wholly in the ship. Orson kept the deck day and night, only dozing fitfully in the chartroom. His pencil was always jabbing at the chart. Whenever the ship had made ten miles he pricked it off. Nancy brought his food, such as it was, and many an hour did she study how to make the poor rations delectable and attractive to him. While he lay on the settee, or dozed in his chair, she knelt or sat beside him, and her fingers caressed his grizzled hair; she crooned little songs she never dared to sing if she knew he heard.

And then one night, when the ship

rolled sickeningly down a path of moonlight, with just wind enough to keep her heavy courses clear of the masts, he suddenly opened his eyes and surprised her in the middle of her song. His eyes fastened upon her face until their sheer force drew her to look at him. His gaze was fixed and unwinking. His hand held hers and she could not free it. She was frightened at the intensity of his gaze. And for what seemed ages he said no word. It was weird. Her flesh crept; and yet she felt as if she wanted to gather his head in her arms and mother him. She knew as well as anybody in the ship now that Val Orson's great ambition could scarcely be realized. Only the most unexpected stroke of luck could drive the *Kestrel* home to a record, and she believed that his piercing gaze so steadfastly fastened upon her was but a prelude to a characteristic bit of verbal cruelty just meant to make her cringe again. She was astonished at his tone when at last he spoke.

"Nancy, why in hell don't you hate me?"

She stammered. Lowered her eyes. Hung her head. Then met his gaze frankly and unafraid.

"I never hated you, Val. Why should I hate you now?"

"Then why aren't you afraid of me, hey?"

"I don't know why," she said, with a little, catchy laugh. "Unless it's because—Oh, I can't tell you, Val. I was frightened of you at first, but I'm not any more. I'm sorry for you sometimes. But not afraid."

"Damn queer!" he growled. "Every —— —— critter in this ship is either afraid of me or hates me: most of 'em both."

"Are you forgetting I'm your wife, Val? Why should I, how could I hate you, or be afraid of you? I could be happy, if you were not so worried."

Orson closed his eyes. His grip tightened upon Nancy's hand, and he chuckled. She laid her head on his chest and settled down to patiently watch over another brief sleep. She heard him chuckling, words:

"That's right, Nancy. I forgot all about the wife part. Why would you be afraid o' me? Good girl, Nancy. Damn good girl."

MEN grumbled more, but the work went on. If they were not to utterly starve to death, the ship must be sailed home, or another ship must be hailed for provisions. One alternative remained; they might compel the captain to put into a nearer port for stores. But that, as most men knew, was not as simple an alternative as it sounded. So the gangs pumped, or tramped drearily at the heels of the mates from one bit of gear to another, while the equatorial sun blazed down, and the water in the tanks grew red and stinking. The paint fell from the bulwarks and houses in great flakes. It revealed the ancient glories of the old ship pitifully. Teak and mahogany paneling marred and disguised with cheap paint. A bulwark panel fell out, and uncovered the original panel beneath, of bright wood, lined with gold, a golden kestrel in flight at each corner. Orson went down to see that, and as he stood there, gazing at the faded beauty that was once his ship's, men might have had their will with him for all he seemed to care. In appearance, Val Orson was many leagues, and many years, distant from the present.

On the day that the ship came the nearest to any land before striking in for her port, the men came aft again and demanded that he put in for stores.

"You demand this, do you?" Orson said, standing at the head of the ladder, gazing gloomily down at the upturned faces.

"Yes, we do. There ain't food enough to take us home, and we can't work without grub. Pumpin' day and night month arter month." The bosun headed the crowd now, and he it was who spoke.

"Men, there's food enough to see us into port," Orson replied. "I can live on it, my officers are living on the same as you get. If a ship heaves in sight and it doesn't hinder me I may ask her for provisions. That'll do. Lay for'ard."

"Bli'me, we'll take the bleedin' boats and quit!" screamed Tredway, and Groves angrily clapped a hand over the little rascal's indiscreet mouth. Orson smiled. Stepping inside the chartroom, he took a fire ax from the beckets and coolly walked down the poop ladder toward the men.

They broke before his menacing advance, ran forward, ready to dodge whichever way he came with the ax. Val Orson never looked so much like destruction as then. Men trembled, wondering who he was coming after first. Mr. Martin trembled on the poop, for this looked like the end of peace.

Orson stopped beneath the boat gallows. Once, twice he struck great overarm blows with the ax, and stove in the port boat.

Once, twice, and the starboard boat was useless. There were only the small boats now, one upturned on the forward house, dried out and unseaworthy, the other upturned across the cabin trunk, beyond possibility of use without connivance of the people aft.

"Pump or sink, my lads. Suit yourselves," he shouted back at them as he went up the ladder.

CHAPTER XXV

MUTINY

THE tobacco was all gone. Orson sent the bad news forward by the two injured men in Nancy's hospital, now sound and well. Those men scarcely realized the grim importance of the message they carried. Each was far too much concerned in leaving the snug quarters they had occupied so long, to be troubled about a bit of tobacco. They thanked Nancy as they left the cabin, and one of them promised to make her a ship in a bottle.

Forward, after the men had returned to their duty, the hands seemed to split definitely into two parties, quite distinct from the division of three gangs which had long been the rule because of the necessity to keep the pumps going. Sails and Chips, Godwin and Norris, and the two recently healed men hung together; two of the men who, besides Godwin and Norris had been chosen as helmsmen, hovered on the fringes of both camps; and the bosun and all the rest of the hands forward kept pretty much to themselves, with Groves again in eminence, and Tredway playing mouthpiece.

As long as the ship was worked, nobody aft took much apparent notice of what the men did with their spare time. Orson was obviously content if his vessel were kept free of water and sailed at the top of her capacity. The mates had ceased to worry over such things as keeping paint and bright work in shape. They saw to the essential gear, mindful of their own welfare, keen to see that the ship's progress never was checked because of faulty service, chafed ropes, or broken sheaves. Mr. Martin had felt aggrieved for a long time at the condition of his ship. Any good chief mate would have felt grieved. But that phase had passed. Both Martin and Ringlin now considered they would count the voyage well accomplished if they got home without getting mixed up in a physical encounter with some of the men. Not that either of them would shirk the encounter if it must come; but Mr. Martin had outgrown his youth, and while he gladly manhandled a man if necessary for the wellbeing of the ship and discipline, he had but a very slight taste for getting tangled up in a serious outbreak.

"Just the same, Mister, you'll keep your eyes peeled," he told Ringlin. "Don't ever let a crowd come up here, unless to work, then call your men by name."

"Not much fear they'll be wanted on the poop," Ringlin returned. "It's a cinch the Old Man won't take sail off her; and we can handle the spanker sheets or brails ourselves. I wouldn't let a man up here anyhow, unless Orson was here himself. Not that I believe anything 's going to be started. It's gone too far. If anything 'ud ha' been going to break, it 'ud busted a long time ago. Too much talkee-talkee in that crowd."

"Norris beat up a man today, didn't he? It ain't all just talkee-talkee, my son," Martin remarked as he went below.

TWO nights later, Orson stood at the poop rail, waiting for a star for observation. His sextant lay on the skylight. He leaned with one elbow on the rail, his free hand in his pocket. Suddenly out of the blackness of the deep waist something flew past his face, just flicking him, but with a sting. It crashed against the mizzenmast, and fell upon the skylight, going straight through the glass and on to the saloon table. Swift as the flight of the missile had been, Orson matched it for swiftness. Before the tinkling of broken glass had ceased, he had whipped out his pistol, and fired instinctively at the spot the missile came from. Something was hit.

A man's voice sobbed out a curse, and then there was silence again; except for a shuffling sort of sound which might have been either bare feet, or the dragging of a body, or simply the chafing of buntlines over the foresail.

Nancy came running up, all fluttery. Close behind her was Martin. Ringlin stood in his tracks where he had been when the shot was fired.

"Oh, what is it, Val?" cried Nancy.

Orson took her arm with unexpected gentleness, turning her toward the companionway.

"Nothing 's the matter. Go to bed, girl. You'll get cold."

"But I heard a shot!"

"I shot at a rat, that's all. Go to bed."

"Then that was the rat I found on the table, beneath the skylight," Mr. Martin growled, slipping something into his pajama pocket.

"Maybe so," Orson said shortly. "I heard the glass go. Go below, Nancy."

Nancy went, obediently. As she stepped into the stairway she murmured as if to herself, though Orson heard every word:

"I thought they had shot you. I thought they had shot you."

"Here's what was on the table, sir," said Martin, producing a fourteen-inch iron belaying pin. "What d'you want to do about it? Did you plug the man, sir?"

"We'll know in the morning," Orson returned. "I'll not do anything. Keep 'em guessing. Stick that pin in the mizzen rail and turn in. You'll be called soon enough when you're wanted."

Mr. Martin exchanged looks of resignation with Ringlin as he went below. That was all the thanks a man got for being right on the job when trouble seemed about to burst! Oh, well.

Orson waited for his star, and got it. So far as any one might observe, he had already forgotten that flying missile out of the blackness. If he gave a thought to the possible result of his snap shot, it was not evident. Ringlin took the time for the star sight at the chronometer, then returned to his watch pacing, while Orson worked up the sight and carried forward his position. The wheel was relieved when relief was due; and the man who came aft to take it trotted along the lee side of the poop without a look inside the chartroom.

IN THE morning Orson was still on deck, and when the watches were changed at eight bells for the forenoon watch, and both mates were up, a quiet tallying of noses went on from aft.

"Tredway!" Mr. Martin grunted. Tredway was missing.

"Shall I fetch him out, sir?" Ringlin asked.

"Leave him alone. If he isn't dead he'll need attention pretty soon. Let him come for it, I'll see that he gets it."

Orson's utter incuriosity concerning the rather grim event of the night spread ferment through the ship. The men went about their work in silence, yet all of them shot furtive glances aft whenever they came on deck. The men who, by turn, went to the galley for the poor rations, stepped inside while waiting for the doctor to dish up; and faces could almost always be seen framed in the galley ports. The men who came to the helm seemed ever expectant of questions; they went forward when their trick was up as silent and puzzled as the rest. They were not asked a question; they had nothing to tell their very anxious shipmates when they were surrounded with questions.

One sultry day when the sea was all mottled and the breeze all broken up by thunder squalls which deluged the ship with rain and drove her groaning along with foam to her catheads, the cabins were stuffy and the skylights and ports kept shut to ward off the thrashing rain. Needing no orders, the men stretched water catches, and replenished the rusty, stinking tanks with sparkling fresh rain water. Nancy stayed on deck. She found the heat and stuffiness unbearable below. She looked very small, and very lonely, huddled there in a corner of the poop rail, wrapped up in an old sou'wester and raincoat of Orson's. That watch Godwin and Norris shared the wheel tricks. And it was Godwin who, passing close by her, almost stopped short to stare into her face, so wan was she, so dark-eyed, so different from the fresh, bubbling Nancy of old. Godwin seemed about to speak to her, daring what might come of it. She smiled at him, then walked away, and he went aft to the wheel. She returned to her corner as soon as he had gone, for it was the only corner where she could wedge herself securely. Orson stood in the weather corner, and he was not wearing a companionable aspect.

Godwin received the course, and steering instructions, from Norris, and apparently that was all that passed between them; but when Norris in his turn passed Nancy on his way forward, he looked keenly into her face, too. He did not pause; but when he reached the forecastle he turned as he went inside for his five minutes spell, and stood there gazing long and intently at the motionless figure of Orson behind the weather-cloth.

There was a deep rumbling of portent in the forecastle that dog-watch. The pumps had sucked for once in a long while; the men were all below except the helmsman.

"WOT'S the use carryin'?" Tredway wanted to know. The little sea lawyer sat like an evil oracle on a battered sea chest. His head was bound up. The captain's bullet had gone through his cheek; now he whistled as he talked, and the impediment only increased his virulence. On the rough table was the evening meal. Poor as it had been hitherto, this marked yet another milestone in the progress of starvation. The doctor had announced that the flour was gone; that the peas would be out after tomorrow; there were beans, but not many, and all the rice was then in the boiler for the cabin supper.

"If it blew a gale right behind us we can't make port in less than a week," Godwin put in.

"And that girl 's starving to death," growled Norris. "If ever I saw weakness and hunger, it's in her eyes."

"Aye, and many's the time we heard her cry out, ain't it, Tom?" said Ike.

"Said he wos a-hurtin' of her once, and her eyes showed it when she come to dress our hurts. Like a blessed angel she wos to us," growled Tom.

"Then it's time something was done other than chatter," put in Groves with relish. He glanced at Norris and Godwin, as if very well content now they had expressed themselves. Old Sails was near the door, smoking scraps of tobacco mixed with rope-yarns, nodding from time to time as a word was spoken that was in tune with his thoughts.

"There may be a ship at any time," Godwin remarked. "It's mutiny, I suppose you all know, to attack the master and mates and force them to sail the ship as we want?"

"Yus, —— stiffen yuh!" whistled Tredway, jumping up and shaking his fist under Godwin's nose. "Yus, and our gutses hollers for real grub. Bli'me, you ain't proper *wiv* us yet, you and yer maybe's!"

Godwin coolly knocked the little man's fist aside.

"Only for the girl, neither Norris nor I would listen to you a minute. But she looks ill. She can't stand the racket like men."

"You're too anxious about the girl," said Groves, evilly. "We want all hands of one mind, so let it pass. But hands off Nancy when we strike! That goes for you all."

"Better say what yuh got in mind an' let's get on with it," cut in the sailor who rarely said anything. "Proper windy, all o' you are."

"How about you, Sails?"

"I won't hinder ye, anyhow," Sails replied. "I'm hungry too."

"Bosun, and Chips?"

"They won't butt in neither. Doctor says he'll shut hisself up in the galley and lay doggo."

"Then," Groves said, "Norris and Godwin, are you with us or not? Guard the door somebody!"

Norris laughed contemptuously. Godwin stared around the crowd as if he enjoyed the situation, although Tredway thumbed a murderously sharpened knife in the doorway. He looked like one of Long John Silver's nightmares, did Tredway, with his bandaged jowl and all.

"We're with all hands for the reason stated, and for no other," Godwin snapped. "In any case we insist that nothing be done until this time tomorrow. We're in the track of ships now, and ought to sight one any time. Let Groves tell all hands just what he means to do when he strikes. That's more to the point. We've waited so long, another day more or less—"

"Yes, what good's it going to do us now? Will hammering Orson give us more to eat?" Norris cut in harshly. Neither he nor Godwin was in love with Groves or his kidney. Tredway sprang into the circle, waving his wicked knife, screaming:

"Less mouths more grub! Groves, make 'em say 'ow they're 'eading. Bli'me, I fink they're both dodgin' Pompey!" By which the little guttersnipe meant to imply, in remote sailorese, that Godwin and Norris were marking time. And the crowd were not friendly to anybody dodging Pompey.

Threatening gestures were in the air. Old Sails slipped out on deck, a bit uncertain. Groves was on his feet, swiftly seeking in the faces about him some import of leadership in fact. Groves wanted to be, and intended to be leader eventually; but he wanted somebody else to be the butt goat in the front rank of the first assault. Norris and Godwin closed together; and Tom and Ike seemed inclined to close back to back with them. And the first battle apparently was ready to be joined right there among the mutineers when, from the forecastlehead ladder, just beside the door, Sails roared out in the full enthusiasm of hungry hope:

"Sail ho! Ship on weather bow, standing to th' west'ard!"

CHAPTER XXVI

ACHIEVEMENT

NOT since the *Kestrel* was off the Horn had another ship hove in sight. Now everybody was on deck, getting a glimpse of a fine shiny four-masted barque, all glittering with harbor polish and new tarred rigging; a thing of majestic loveliness in her dress of new sails and jewels of burnished brass. She was beating toward the stiffer ordeal through which the *Kestrel* had recently come. The *Kestrel* sailed before a fair sparkling breeze which grew hourly, blowing her fair for home, a white bone in her teeth, a creaming trail of foamy bubbles at her rusty sides, a wide, straight wake astern.

"Here she comes, out'ard bound," cried an old Limehouse rat, still able to thrill to the sight of a splendid ship; particularly when that splendid ship was going to be stopped to give him food.

"Aye, clean pannikins and rusty throats. And here we go, rusty pannikins and throats parched clean," rejoined a shipmate. It was easy for that sea-weary crew to bring out all the moldy old sea jokes used when an outward bounder was met by a homeward bound ship. And at that moment, had Val Orson twigged a finger to order a signal to be flown, never a thought of mutiny would have lived a moment aboard the flying *Kestrel*. Sailors have notoriously short memories for hurts, and nobly simple minds. At least, the real sailors have.

Steamships are likely to have a crew of grocers' clerks, or plasterers' laborers as anything; such as they can not be expected to have simple minds, or that largeness of soul which forgets a grievance when the cause is dead. But aboard the *Kestrel*, men who a moment before were itching to turn pirate and scuttle the ship with much cutting of throats, now that hungry bellies seemed certain to be fed forgot all about mutiny and saw only what every deepwater sailorman sees in an ocean meeting. All, that is, except Groves and Tredway. Tredway was but a bit of a man anyhow, and Groves never had been a man, though he'd been a parson. Had he been a man, he'd have remained a parson, for that's a man's job.

"Ain't that th' big *Khedivieh?*" one wanted to know.

"Looks like her. Noo larst year, wuzn't she? See her out in Sydney, I did. I wuz in the *Fermoppily.*"

"You in th' flyin' *Thermopylæ?* Wot was you? Galley swab?"

SO THE banter went, the big fourmaster came across the *Kestrel's* bows. The officers on the poop were gazing at her while taking care that their own duty came first. Nancy stood at the poop rail, her eyes all alight with pleasure at the glorious sight. Her face was pale and wan, and there was something about her figure which seemed to hint at low vitality where all should have been sparkling, buoyant life. But her face was alight because her eyes saw beauty. If she ever took her eyes away from that tall fourmaster slashing athwart the *Kestrel's* course, it was to glance at Val Orson, inside the chart-room.

Nancy only glanced there. She was fascinated by that great new steel sailing ship, power and grace in steel and canvas; never knowing that the big *Khedivieh* represented the last dying blow of a fight against steam. Had she known that, perhaps she might have seen tragedy rather than beauty out there ahead. But now she saw only loveliness; sparkling blue and dazzling white; foaming bow and glinting brass; and, moreover, as soon as the signal went up there would be a transfer of stores and contentment aboard the *Kestrel*.

But Orson made no signal. The fourmaster slipped fast down to the westward. Men stopped joking. They moved aft. Mr. Martin edged nearer the chart-room, and Ringlin took his eyes from the big barque to glance forward, for the men were muttering and moving.

"Will you signal her for stores, sir?" Mr. Martin asked with respect.

Orson still pored over his figures. From time to time he put out his head and glanced aloft, around at the sky, at the long rolling seas that bore his ship onward. The fourmaster was well to leeward now. Men approached the *Kestrel's* poop ladder.

Orson came out of the chart-house. He was haggard, and his mouth looked as if he were grimly aware of a life-and-death contest awaiting him around the next corner. He had a scribbling pad in his hand. Men, thinking he had just doped out the signal flags, trooped joyously near. He looked again at the pad. At the sail trim. At the sky astern. Everywhere but at the ship ahead.

"The record is six days and eleven hours from this position, Mister. Take a drag on that foretopsail sheet," he said. "They can last another six days!"

"A drag on the—" Martin started to shout, when the onset came. It came as if, like a river in spate, it was independent of all human will. Martin was at the poop ladder, in the act of shouting the order. He was rolled under by a tidal wave of oxlike human anger. Martin was saved to his wife and family by that first onset being oxlike. He fell beneath the port ladder, and the tide rolled over him. Ringlin ran to the skipper's side. Orson stood there like a rock, glaring at the oncoming crowd. He seemed as coldly contemptuous of them as he had ever been. He had no weapon. He stood there, pencil and pad in hand, facing that mob which charged up two ladders at once and rolled over their own leaders in charging.

"Stop that ship fer grub!" screeched a voice.

"Let me talk to him reasonably!" broke in Norris' voice.

"Reason my neck!" countered another. Then up the top steps leaped a bunch of men thrust forward by Groves. Tredway lurked a bit behind, as always; but he wielded a murderously pointed knife. He thumbed it while the ladder was being rushed. Groves, in the open now that he had fooled others to fill the front rank, thrust up the ladder armed with the broad ax of old Chips himself.

Godwin and Norris had been among the first to get to the ladder. They were as determined as anybody to make Orson stop the ship for stores. They had not intended murder. They were determined to make the mad driving skipper of the *Kestrel* realize that he had others to think about besides himself. Now they found themselves, by the cunning of Groves, facing Orson on his own poop, and, as bound to happen with any decent man in like circumstances, they didn't know how to act. They were no movie picture pirates. No fiction bad men, but they acted just as any man, taking ninety per cent of any crowd, would act.

They hesitated, looking from Orson to Nancy, mutely asking guidance. Nancy looked terrified at the abrupt invasion.

Orson stared at the invaders as if they were queer sea beasts hove aboard by an upheaval.

TREDWAY came to the top. The little guttersnipe was hideous in his bandages and rage. His knife was ground to a stiletto edge and point. But still the little man cared for his own skin. He was creeping up, behind another man, Norris, when Orson uttered his ultimatum. Then, though it takes longer to tell, Tredway shoved through Norris' legs, rose to a half crouch, and thrust upward at Orson's breast with his knife as Groves raised his ax behind him.

Orson fell. Tredway's knife entered between his ribs. It was all so swiftly done that mates and men were staggered. Remember, this was a sudden attack by otherwise decent sailormen led to rebellion by hardship and bad example.

Tredway rose to full height as Orson sagged to his knees; to a heap. Groves brought his ax down with a grunt of purpose. Orson's head it was aimed at. Orson's head fell under Tredway's knife thrust as Tredway's head rose triumphantly, and Tredway's head met the ax in full sweep.

"Q-u-u-unkkk!"

Martin fought from under a pile of men who didn't want to kill him but meant to keep him from helping Orson. Ringlin's pistol refused to shoot just at the instant when Groves tried to split Orson's skull. The young second mate had quality. He knew a crisis when it faced him. The moment Tredway's head fell apart under Groves' ax, Ringlin pulled trigger twice without result; and in a second more his pistol, butt, trigger guard, and cylinder end smashed into Groves' face like a pile-driver, and the once reverend pitched forward to bury his own ruined face in the fatal débris of Tredway.

Men stopped short, awed by such swift tragedy. Only a few of them, if any, had meant to carry matters to the point of death, and here lay Orson, if not dead then apparently dying; there lay Tredway, as dead as ever a man could be, a silly grin on his face matching the split in his skull with hideous humor. Groves might crawl a fathom away, but that was about as far as he would be able to go in this life.

Norris and Godwin paused right at Orson's prostrate form. They had never meant to see things go so far. They had meant to see that Nancy Prouse got the food so obviously necessary to her well-being, and had honestly meant to bring about that end by any means in their power, but they had never dreamed of stark murder. However, since murder was done, they would carry out the plan, and one look at Nancy's face strengthened them in their resolve. Nancy looked as if she had met the the eye of utter doom. Three men, who had been closest to Groves in all his plotting except Tredway, shoved by Norris and Godwin and stooped to drag out Orson. They would see that he at least was where they could make use of him either as hostage or mouthpiece. Godwin lent a hand. They were dragging Orson to the ladder. Men piled upon Ringlin and Martin, milling, pummelling, awkward in a life or death fight. And like a she-cat kept from her litter, Nancy leaped into the mêlée, kneeling beside Orson, taking his head on her knee and blazing up at the amazed, milling men who believed they were doing her service.

"Little lady, let us relieve you of him. He shall stop that ship for stores," Norris said, trying gently to remove her hands from Orson's head. She looked up at him, with dumb horror in her eyes.

"You have murdered my husband! Leave him with me!" she breathed. And as if there were nothing on earth to matter now, Nancy sat on the deck, drew Orson's head upon her lap, and tremblingly unfastened his clothes to get at the wound.

The big fourmaster drove on into the sunset. Mr. Martin dragged out his pistol, and fired one shot in the air. Then, sure that it would shoot, he backed the crowd off the poop and Ringlin drove the attack home with his own useless weapon.

"Hands to the pumps!" he roared, boisterously. Young Ringlin was a juvenile at heart still. He saw the men on the run, and made them run faster. And the gang whose turn it was, went silently to the pumps.

There was no song.

CHAPTER XXVII

ABORNING

ORSON lay so still that Nancy was frightened. At her command, the steward brought up water and bandages from the medicine chest. She had meant to attend to his hurt there on deck; but he remained so stark and rigid she was about to call to the mate for assistance to carry him to his room. Then Orson showed signs of life. His eyelids quivered. The deep lines about his lips twitched. His strong face, suddenly so gray and worn, was twisted in a spasm of pain, and blood ran over Nancy's fingers at the wound. But a ghost of his old time smile hovered about him; that smile which had so much in it of indulgent superiority, almost a sneer in itself. His eyes opened, and flashed quick glances around. The bodies of Tredway and Groves lay where they had fallen; fairly in his range of sight as Nancy supported his head.

"Who in hell stopped 'em?" he asked, weakly. "Who was soft enough to miss a chance at me like that?"

Nancy suddenly let her head droop. She held him fast, and began crying softly. A sort of whimsical surprise chased the ghostly smile from his face, and he tried to turn so that he might see her.

"Oh, Val!" she murmured, "I thought they had killed you!"

"And you're cryin' because they didn't?" Even in dire extremity Orson must thrust in the goad and watch her cringe. But Nancy was full of her own thoughts now; she murmured on, paying no heed to his sarcasm.

"You must n't die now, Val. You must get well. Our son will need you—"

"What?" Orson almost sat upright, and his exclamation ended in a groan of agony. But he stared hard into her wet face, and saw therein rosy color for all the distress; there was gentle pride there, too. And Orson recalled that mock marriage ceremony which had so easily satisfied simple Nancy.

"Good God!" He gasped.

"Why, Val, aren't you glad?"

Without a trace of sarcasm, Orson told her all about that marriage. All the rosy color, all the happiness faded from her face, leaving her wide-eyed and pale. Her eyes never left his until he ceased talking and lay back with eyes shut again.

"You can't mean that! Val, you're only joking!'"

"I wish I was, girl," he muttered. "If I was I'd enjoy the joke, for there's damned little prospect of many more jokes in my life."

HE LAY so still she feared he was dead. But he was thinking. He remembered those days when Nancy sang. And among the hardships of those bitterest days she had never failed to fill the part of a real wife in service, comfort or bravely smiling face. She was proud to be the mother of his child. She was sure of giving him a son. Of all the many light loves he had trifled with, Nancy Prouse alone had taken it for granted that he meant to be honest with her. She accepted the situation once she saw it was inevitable, believing in him; and, believing in him, she had never fallen down in one essential to decent wifehood. And now he was just about three parts dead; the ship could not reach port in less than six days, drive as he might, even supposing he retained life enough to drive. Orson did not believe he could live two days, much less six.

Of all the women he ever knew, Nancy, perhaps the simplest soul born, was of that fiber which makes strongest for the letter and form of legitimacy. Once satisfied as to the form, Nancy could forget forever the fashion of her mating. But this blow that had fallen on her, this very real upheaval of all her beliefs and hopes, left her stunned. She sat there on the deck, with his head in her arms, staring glassily out to sea where the westering sun turned to gilded ivory the vanishing sails of that fine big fourmaster. In all the visible ocean around, there was no speck save that.

"Val!" she whispered. "Val! Please don't joke with me. Tell me—"

Suddenly he opened his eyes again. His hand gripped her wrist so that it hurt.

"Look at that!" he rasped, pointing at the hideously broken head of Groves, the smashed features frozen in death into a mask of devilish mirth, grotesque, horrible. "Could that have ever said a prayer that'd be heard? Nancy girl, I hope you can believe that I feel sorry. I never did before over a woman. I haven't a lot of breath left. Do as I tell you. Don't argue. Tell the mate to have a cot fixed up right here. Here where I can see what's doing. Tell the steward to bring me my rifle and some cartridges. Hurry up."

His tone was as metallic as of old. The mate and steward fixed him up, on a cot lashed to the mizzenmast, the head end raised so that he might command a sweep of the ship from the poop rail to the jibboom. The gang at the pumps finished their spell while the cot was being fastened. And Orson hauled himself onto it, grimly, with set teeth, and eyes that held exquisite pain. A clear, lovely night was stealing over the sea; stars winked in the east as the sun slumbered in the west; there was a healthful, caressing breeze, and the *Kestrel* sailed on for her port.

"Mister, make those men keep her pumped free," Orson told the mate harshly. "I want to hear the pumps suck from here, and if ever I miss the sound I'll pepper somebody if the kick of the gun kicks my lights out. And—" he whispered, his breath coming in choked sobs— "make the ship travel. Make her go!"

Nancy settled down to watch her man. Men muttered that Val Orson was proving himself superhuman. There he lay, his grim face all pallid, and his lips gray, seemingly about to slip his earthly cable. But he had a rifle alongside of him right in what might easily be his death bed; and his cry was, still, as it had been for months, 'Sail the ship! Make her travel!"

"Batty about records!" men said.

"Never mind, we'll get full bellies all the sooner," others would say.

"Wot'll 'e do wiv them dead blokes?" the ancient Limehouser muttered.

"Maybe dump 'em, now there's nobody to say a prayer over 'em!" a man responded gloomily.

AT EIGHT bells the pumps stopped. Men had two-hour spells since the finer weather set in, keeping the water at a negotiable level. Two minutes after the clank of the rods ceased, the sharp crack of a small bore rifle echoed along the decks, and men who were next on turn leaped outside in panic.

"Keep the pumps sucking! Don't ever stop!" roared Ringlin, almost dancing with frenzy because it was in his watch that Orson found it necessary first to fire a shot.

The pumping had never sounded so monotonous. At midnight Orson caught the coat of the second mate.

"Get a couple of hands and dump the two stiffs," he whispered.

"Sew them up, sir?"

"Chuck 'em over. Don't waste time on them."

Ringlin told Mr. Martin about it. Said the Old Man was madder than ever about breaking that record.

"Mad as he was, he always had a bit o' service said over the others," Ringlin grumbled. "Now he says, just dump 'em."

"Then what're you waiting for? Dump 'em," growled Martin.

Men complained, as they must. Being driven all the voyage to set up a record which none of them believed possible, half starved, worked silly at the endless pumping grind, led to set up a mutiny by leaders who proved just as vulnerable as common men and far more so than the man they mutinied against, now that port was within measurable distance, and the driving hellion of a skipper lay close to the door of death, they were driven still and harder than ever.

"Crazy as a bedbug!"

"Gorn proper mad now, 'e 'ave!"

"Mad, yes, but the madman's got guts!" Norris muttered.

"I hope he lives, but he can't," Godwin rejoined.

"And s'pose he lives. Wot'll we git done to us?" inquired the sailor who rarely said much. "Mutin's a hangin' job, ain't it?"

"That's in the future, but stopping the pumps is a shooting job in the present. Whose next spell is it. Hop to it."

DAY and night Val Orson lay there speaking only the briefest word, then only in a whisper. Nancy watched him in awed silence. He ate nothing; drank a little water often; seemed to doze for long intervals, yet his eyes would instantly open if sound or sense implied to him that the ship might do better. When he seemed most like death, he would take Nancy's hand and hold it tightly; then his teeth closed upon his under lip and started the blood trickling. Once, at the end of the fifth day since the uprising, he sighed heavily, gave Nancy a wan smile, and swooned away. She brought Martin in swift alarm. And between them they brought Orson back to earth.

"Let us put you in your bunk, sir," Martin said. "There's no chance of beating that record now. You'll be more easy in bed."

"The record I want is still possible. Drive her!" Orson smiled weakly.

At the change of watches on the sixth morning, young Ringlin tried his luck. He too had acquired a measure of admiration for his driving skipper.

"You can depend on us, sir. Martin and I can drive her. We'll do it, too. Won't you turn in, sir? You're hurt badly, d'ye know."

"Keep her going, and tell me the moment you make the land." That was all. The last hour of the old record sped by, and the land was still beneath the horizon. Men knew. The whisper went around the ship. The mad skipper was hopelessly behind all possibility of that record he coveted, yet he still drove the old ship as if the passage was just starting. Toward evening, Martin reported:

"Just made out the lightship, sir. Will you take a tug, or anchor in the outer harbor?"

"Get out the code book. Make this signal. Keep it flying, and keep the ship going." Orson held out a piece of paper with a signal message written down. Nancy sat in a weary little heap by his cot; she dozed, but aroused at the report of land.

Past the lightship flew the *Kestrel*, still piling up the foam at her bows. Men at the pumps, and others standing idle, discussed that signal that the mate sent up.

"Doctor?" one surmised.

"Police, more like!" growled one less easy in his mind.

"Maybe it's only our number."

"Here's one bloke as won't stop to see, if the shore comes near enough to jump! Wonder what he's goin' to do?"

AFT the mates grew uneasy. There was no order yet about preparing the anchors for letting go. Though the land was now in plain view, the harbor open ahead, the ship still roared through the darkling seas under full sail.

A pilot boat bobbed on the water ahead.

"You'll take a pilot, sir?" enquired Martin.

"Stop for nobody! Sail over him if he gets in the way."

A tug steamed out, puffing hopefully around to head off the ship. Martin held his tongue. The *Kestrel* bore down until the tug was forced to sheer aside and put on steam to avoid being sunk. The faintest flicker of a grin danced over Orson's face as the tug-boatmen's language floated after the flying ship, pungent and free.

"We'll be inside in fifteen minutes, sir. Start getting sail off her?" Mr. Martin knew there was bound to be a smash. He felt it in his bones.

"D'ye think anybody's taken our signal and telegraphed it in?" Orson panted.

"They waved from the lightship, sir!"

"Take in royals and flying jib, then. Strip her to topsails and inner-jib. Never mind pumping any more. And steer for that old lumber dock up the river. Don't take any notice of anybody."

Men about the harbor still tell of the day the flying *Kestrel* roared up the bay, through the narrows, and into the river under sail. Doing twelve knots they said she was, with a big crew of men darting about her decks and rigging as if possessed of seven devils of work. Nancy found herself pushed aside; Orson summoned some secret reserve of endurance, and stood at the rail conning the ship. As wharf after wharf slid past, and the river stream grew tranquil, the crew began to cling to the landward side of the ship, estimating the jumping distance, with always an eye open for that grim figure at the poop rail. Orson's gaze was fixed upon a line of sheds ahead, with an old dock at the end. It seemed that there were men standing there. As soon as it was certain they were men, Orson staggered aft, sent the helmsman away, and took the wheel himself.

"Let-go everything and clew up," he gasped, and the mates ran to the gear, sure that the order was too late. It was. Orson steered his big ship in from midstream. She slid alongside, stuck her jibboom through the shed and broke it off, and while her sails were still fluttering, she crashed to a stop with her golden *Kestrel* soaring above the broken timbers of the old wharf.

"Never mind lines. She's in the mud. See if that's a parson there on the dock. It ought to be," Orson panted, sitting heavily down on the wheel grating, while Nancy ran to his side with a cry, and every man in the ship except Godwin and Norris and the two mates leaped ashore and ran as if from the plague.

A clean looking old clergyman climbed over the rail, and came straight to the poop.

"Your signal for a priest was sent to the Mission, Captain," he said. "Is some poor fellow dying? Is it himself, miss?" he asked, looking into Nancy's face.

"Don't waste words!" Orson rasped. "Marry us, quick!"

The clergyman was a practical man. He beckoned to another man who had come aboard with him, and meanwhile opened his prayer book.

Martin and Ringlin stood there with bared heads, Godwin and Norris came to the top of the poop ladder, looking on curiously. While the parson was swiftly tying the knot with a real sailor's knot that was safe enough even for simple Nancy, the other man was opening the medical satchel of an experienced surgeon. So when Mr. Martin, and Ringlin, had affixed their signatures as witnesses to Nancy's legal papers, the parson stepped aside and let in the doctor, while poor Nancy cried softly, certain now that her man had lost whatever chance for life he might have had simply to reach port in time to put her right with the world.

"He will get well, won't he doctor?" she begged.

"Well, little lady, he ought not to; but he's tough, and I wouldn't tell the undertaker yet. But he'll need care."

"Oh, I'll take care of him! He's just got to get well now. He must."

"Then he most probably will," the doctor said gravely, after one keen look into Nancy's eyes.

Mr. Martin and Ringlin, with Godwin and Norris, put out shore lines. It was a long job for the small gang, and the dock was dark.

"Do you mind if we stay by the ship, sir?" Godwin asked when the work was done.

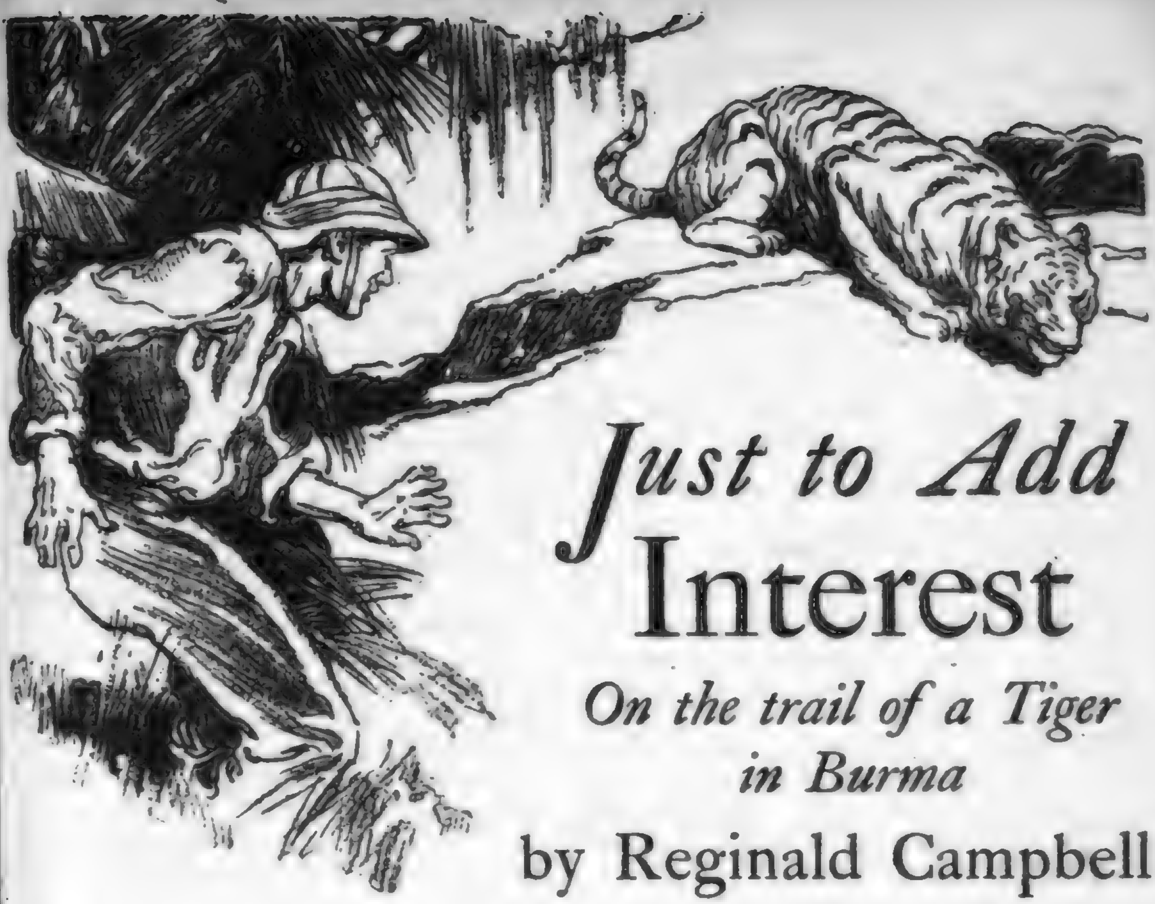
"Gluttons, ain't you?" growled Martin. Ringlin chuckled.

"Not exactly," grinned Godwin. "You see, Norris and I joined this hooker to see how tough Val Orson was. We've seen. He's as tough as they said. And we want to see if he's tough enough to recover. Isn't that it, Norris?"

"That's about it," agreed Norris. "Anyhow, we surely hope he is."

"Then stay. If sailors want to stand by Val Orson, he's sure made a record he never knew about!" answered Mr. Martin.

THE END.



Just to Add Interest

On the trail of a Tiger in Burma

by Reginald Campbell

THE friendship between Ashton and Clavering had stood the test, not only of time, but of loneliness. For years they had lived together in joint charge of a great teak forest in central Burma, where the comforts and distractions of civilization are non-existent, and where mud, fever, mosquitoes and ennui are liable to make men distinctly snappish at times.

Yet, in spite of the combined hardships and boredom that is the lot of the jungle-wallah out East, Ashton and Clavering had never once been known to quarrel. They were as Jonathan and David, so said the few other teak-wallahs that were scattered throughout that wild, rolling country, and so they admitted themselves.

This friendship was broken, however, for a whole fortnight by one rupee, the equivalent of one shilling and fourpence. And this is the way it came about.

On a sunny August morning they were seated together in the bungalow they had built in the heart of the forest, when a black-brown villager came crawling over the floor toward them.

"Lords," said the man, as he salaamed respectfully, "I come from the village of Mong Toom, where bad business is afoot."

"And the business?" asked Ashton.

"Night before last," continued the villager, "one of our women went to bathe in a jungle stream. She did not return to her home that night. Yesterday morning we found her. There was the hair of her head—and bones." The native broke off and shuddered, while the white men watched him expectantly.

"Yesterday evening," resumed the villager, "my son went into the jungle to drive home my buffaloes. He never came back. This morning we found him, and near the body were the tracks of a tiger." The speaker raised skinny arms in a pathetic gesture toward his hearers.

"The white Lords will help with their guns?" he asked brokenly. "He—he—was my only son."

"They will help," answered Clavering steadily.

THERE followed a short conversation between the three, and, it having been arranged that the two Europeans should proceed to the village of Mong Toom that evening before dark, the native salaamed again and hastened back to the village in order to build a *machan* on a tree that overlooked one of the tiger's victims.

"Poor old devil," breathed Clavering, when the man had disappeared. "We must get that tiger."

"We must," agreed Ashton. "Wonder which of us two will bag the brute."

"You're the best shot," said the other.

"Yes, but your nerves are steadier, Clavering."

"What about a bet on the result? Just to add interest."

"Right-oh. How much?"

"Any old sum. The smaller the better."

"One rupee?" suggested Ashton.

"That'll do, as it's only to add interest."

Clavering drew out a silver rupee from his pocket, and rising, placed it on the mantelpiece. His companion tossed him a coin, and the stakes were laid side by side between two vases of wild flowers. The sun, streaming in through the open window, shone on those two rupees and the faces of the men regarding them. Then a cloud swept over the sky and the room was shadowed.

That afternoon, as the pair were in the act of setting out for the village of Mong Toom, which lay some two miles to the north of their bungalow, Ashton paused at the top of the steps and glanced up at the sky.

"We ought to bring a lantern with us, I think," he exclaimed.

"A lantern? Why? asked his friend. "The moon's nearly full tonight."

"Yes, but if the clouds get much heavier the moon won't help us at all."

"But a lantern might scare the brute from coming," protested the other.

"I doubt it. Remember Jenkins? He bagged a tiger on a pitch dark night by the aid of a lantern."

"I know, but—" and for some ten minutes they argued, until eventually Ashton gave way and they decided to trust to the moon not being obscured after dark had fallen.

Clavering then placed two slivers of wood between his fingers and held out one hand toward Ashton.

"For the honor of first shot. If you draw the longer piece, it goes to you."

Ashton drew, and won. "My honor," he laughed. "I'll win that rupee, old boy."

A moment later the two, their shot and ball guns slung over their shoulders, were striding along a little path that ran through the jungle in the direction of the north.

DARKNESS found Ashton and Clavering crouched on the boards of the *machan* that overlooked a small natural clearing in which lay the remains of the villager's son.

After they had waited in expectancy for the better part of an hour, the moon began to rise and shed its pure, pale light over the dark stems of the forest that walled the clearing in on every side. The men, whose features were white and tense, peered into the moon-glittering night, their guns at the ready, their ears strained to catch the slightest sound that might herald the approach of the man-eater.

Time passed, but still the tiger did not appear, and at last, with a sob of disappointment, they saw that the moon was being obscured by heavy clouds.

"If only we'd brought that lantern," whispered Ashton.

"Can't help that. Damn," Clavering hunched up his shoulders, "it's beginning to rain."

It was indeed. The rain, light at first, gradually increased to a steady downpour and soaked the watchers' thin clothing till they were chilled to the bone.

Then, suddenly, when the hands of Clavering's luminous watch showed that the time was past midnight, a faint, very faint, sound came from somewhere below them, and they strained their vision in the direction of the noise till it seemed that their eyeballs would burst from the sockets.

"My God, the crunching of bones! It must have come, and we can't see it," quavered Ashton, his teeth chattering with cold and excitement.

"There's something dark just near the body," breathed his companion. "Perhaps that's the tiger."

"But we can't be sure."

"No, but you'd better have a go at it. The rain may last all night."

Ashton took careful aim and fired at the undefinable black shape. The shot roared and crashed through the night, stabbing the stillness of the jungle with a suddenness that jarred the senses. As the echoes of the shot died away, they peered breathlessly over the edge of the *machan*.

The black shape was still there. Bu

was it? They blinked and rubbed the rain out of their eyes. They looked again. They could not be sure, for the night and the loneliness and the rain were playing tricks on their nerves. If only there was a moon, or even a lantern.

For the remainder of the night they crouched in their refuge, as they dared not descend in case the tiger should have been wounded. Mosquitoes tortured them, the calls of night birds startled their overwrought nerves, and the cold, hopeless rain persisted in its downpour.

Dawn came at last, and, stiff and weary, they climbed down to the clearing. On the muddy earth were the plain tracks of a tiger, but no bloodstains.

"So that shape was the tiger," said Ashton irritably. "If only you'd taken my advice and brought the lantern, I wouldn't have missed."

"Well, there's no need to get sore about it, man," replied the other. "And now for Heaven's sake let's get back home. We don't want to stand here arguing about it, as the brute may be watching us even now."

THEY walked back to their bungalow, and neither was in the best temper. They called loudly to their Burmese boy for hot water, and having bathed, sat down to breakfast. During the meal neither spoke, but each read studiously the advertisements in some six-weeks'-old illustrated papers. On the mantelpiece two silver rupees were lying.

The following night they sat up for the tiger again, this time on a tree that overlooked the body of a water-buffalo the man-eater had killed.

A slight argument had taken place before they left the bungalow as to who should shoot first. Ashton considered that they should draw for the honor again, Clavering that it was his turn. Eventually they drew, and Clavering won. They took a lantern with them, and hung it on a branch of the tree that stretched over the *machan*, with the result that the whole clearing below them was illuminated.

Clouds again obscured the moon, and rain fell heavily. The mosquitoes were worse, if possible, than the previous night. The tiger, however, either frightened by the light or busy elsewhere, did not return to its kill, and the net result of the men's vigil was another thorough drenching.

"Why, damn it, Ashton," muttered Clavering as they descended the tree on the first pale streaks of dawn, "from the grin on your face you might be almost pleased the tiger didn't come."

The other did not reply to this, but marched off to the bungalow ahead of his companion. At breakfast they read the advertisements with a studiousness that was aggressive. An hour later news was brought to them that the tiger had killed another villager while they had been watching over the buffalo.

THERE followed a week's heartbreaking search for that tiger. Its tracks were reported here, there and everywhere in the vicinity of Mong Toom. Three more natives were taken, but in spite of every effort the brute eluded its pursuers, for it seemed to have the cunning of the devil himself.

The Europeans gave up all idea of sitting up for it, and contented themselves with the risky game of stalking it on foot. In their anxiety and unspoken rivalry they lost all sense of personal danger; they were out to get that tiger, and get him they would. The thought as to who would bag the animal first became an obsession. Tiger was in their minds from morning to night. When they dressed they thought of tiger; at meals they ate mechanically, their brains revolving on tiger; when they slept they dreamed of tiger.

At last one afternoon Ashton, tired after a morning's fruitless stalking, sank into a heavy sleep, to awaken shortly before dark.

"Where is the Lord Clavering?" he asked snappishly as the Burmese servant brought a lamp into the room.

The man pointed vaguely in the direction of the north.

"A villager came to the Lord Clavering while master was asleep, to say that the tiger had been seen lying under a *yang* tree near Mong Toom. So the Lord Clavering went."

Ashton sprang to his feet, dismissed the boy, and commenced striding swiftly up and down the room.

So, he reflected, Clavering had taken a mean advantage of him while he had been asleep. Had gone off without even waking him and giving him the opportunity to come too. It was not playing fair. It would serve Clavering right if the tiger got him, by Jove.

His brooding thoughts were broken by the entry of Clavering himself, and Ashton whirled on his heel and faced the newcomer. One glance at his companion's features, however, assured Ashton that the tiger was still at large and that the news had proved without foundation.

For a few seconds they stared at one another, and their eyes were bright with fever. White men can not spend nights up trees in streaming rain, and tramp over rough country in all weathers, without some evil after effects.

Then Clavering turned abruptly and walked toward his gun case. Taking out an oily rag, he began to clean the wet from his weapon.

Ashton went to his own gun case, which lay at the other end of the room, and began to polish his gun.

The lamp shone over two men, cleaning guns, cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. Its rays also fell on two objects on the mantelpiece. And the objects seemed almost to wink.

THREE days later Ashton got the opportunity of turning the tables on his companion, for news was brought to him by a native while Clavering was out that the tiger had been seen lying up in a *nullah* situated some two miles to the south of the bungalow.

After hastily interrogating the man as to the exact whereabouts of the animal, Ashton seized his gun and began to load feverishly.

"If the master will wait a few minutes," said the native as the white man slung weapon over shoulder, "the Lord Clavering will be here."

"What mean you?" snapped Ashton.

"Master, I sent a friend of mine with a message to the Lord Clavering, who is searching near Mong Toom, telling him of where the tiger had been seen. I thought that the two lords would wish to go together."

Ashton's only answer was to fling an oath at the speaker and rush out of the bungalow toward the south.

After some ten minutes' walking along the tiny forest track, he came to where the path branched into two. Each of these branches led, he knew, to the *nullah,* and the native had told him that the tiger had been seen lying in the *nullah* opposite to where the right-hand branch of the path ran into the creek. Ashton therefore took the right-hand turning and hurried on.

He had not made more than a few yards' progress when a large round ball suspended from a tree on one side of the path caught his attention, and he halted abruptly, for he realized that the ball contained death: death in the shape of the great red and yellow striped hornets whose stings are feared by every living thing of the jungle.

He began edging carefully past it, when he saw that a piece of bamboo jutted right across the path in front of him, and that the slightest touch might cause the bamboo to wave and disturb the hornets' nest. He therefore bent almost double and crept beneath it. Once on the other side he straightened himself upright and drew a deep sigh of relief.

"Bit of luck I saw that," he muttered. "And now for the tiger."

He was in the act of striding forward again, when a thought struck him like a blow in the face. There was Clavering to be considered: Clavering who would come blundering after him, in his haste not to see the nest, and, brushing the bamboo aside, meet death or severe illness from the occupants of the nest he had unwittingly disturbed.

He, Ashton, ought either to wait where he was and shout a warning to Clavering on his approach, or else endeavor to cut the bamboo obstruction away from the path. But, Ashton reflected, the latter course would prove a dangerous undertaking, while if he waited for Clavering he would in all probability miss the opportunity of bagging the tiger alone.

For a minute he remained in indecision, then suddenly his brow darkened. Clavering, the man whom he had once called his friend, had betrayed that friendship, had done the dirty on him, had tried to take a mean advantage over him, so his fever-ridden brain told him.

"It's his own lookout, his own lookout, and I owe him nothing, nothing," Ashton breathed thickly.

Next second he was striding on down the path.

Some twenty minutes later he had arrived at the *nullah.* Once there, he glanced carefully round, but his straining eyes were rewarded by no sign of the tiger. He peered behind boulders, and ran up and down the length of the dry creek, but beyond a cormorant seeking for fish in a small pool not a single living thing was in sight.

After a while the man came to the conclusion that the native who had visited him that afternoon had possibly confused right with left, as natives often did, and that he should have taken the left-hand branch of the path instead of the right.

He therefore commenced walking rapidly up the creek toward where he knew the former branch ran into the *nullah*.

WHILE Ashton was stumbling up the creek, Clavering was hastening down the right-hand path, in a fever of anxiety to overtake his companion. A piece of bamboo that obstructed his way he brushed impatiently aside. The undergrowth behind him crackled and flipped as the bamboo swung backward, and next second an angry hum rose up and droned through the heat-filled atmosphere.

Clavering was about to turn his head toward the sound, when a stab, like a red-hot needle, pierced the nape of his neck. Dropping his gun, he hunched up his shoulders and without daring to look behind him he jumped off the path into the tangle of jungle that bordered the track.

As he did so he was conscious of queer noises somewhere in his rear, but he took no heed of them, for he knew only that he must run for his life. And run he did, madly, blindly, desperately, through the riot of vegetation that plucked and tore at arms and clothing with a thousand streaming claws.

After what seemed hours of frightful going, but in reality could not have been more than a few minutes at the most, he burst out on to the left-hand branch of the path, where he checked his wild flight and glanced frenziedly round him.

Then a sob of relief broke from his lips. He had shaken off the hornets and escaped death by a miracle, thanks to the promptness with which he had jumped sideways into the jungle.

Having recovered his breath slightly, he began to hasten along the branch on which he now was in order to warn Ashton, who would be somewhere in the *nullah*, of the danger of returning home by the right-hand path.

After he had made a few paces, however, he began to change his mind. His neck was by now very swollen and painful, and the sooner he returned to his bungalow and bathed it in ammonia the better. And after all, he told himself, *why* should he go out of his way, at considerable personal risk now that he had no gun, to warn Ashton of the hornets? Ashton had once been his friend, of course, but the man had just taken a mean advantage over him, and betrayed that friendship.

Clavering's face went grim, and, swinging on his heel, he commenced striding rapidly toward the north again.

He had not been walking more than a few minutes when, on rounding a bend in the track, he came full in sight of the tiger. It was crouching, with its back toward him, right across the track at the point where the two branches met into one and continued on up toward the bungalow.

Clavering froze in his stride and edged fearfully backward till he was round the bend again and out of sight of the man-eater. Then fear caught him, fear that sent his hair crackling and his spine crawling in a very ecstasy of terror.

He was alone, alone in the jungle, and he had no gun. The weapon he had left near the hornets' nest, and he dared not return for it. He must rush back to the creek and find Ashton, but then Ashton might have already returned by the right-hand path and met his death by stings. God, his sin had found him out.

He began running madly toward the creek, and on turning a corner ran right into the man he was seeking.

They halted and stared at one another, and their faces were strangely white.

Clavering was the first to speak. "The tiger," he gasped, "it's up there," he jerked thumb over shoulder.

Ashton, who had given up all hope of finding the tiger in the *nullah*, and was therefore returning home by the path that was free from hornets, started. Then: "Where's your gun?" he asked sharply.

"Dropped it. Hornets," replied the other briefly.

A short, uneasy silence followed, which was broken by Ashton.

"You—you take the gun," he said thickly. "Your nerves are better than mine."

"No—no. You keep it. The gun's yours. You win. You're the better shot."

Ashton shrugged his shoulders and began walking tensely up the path, followed by the other. They rounded the bend, to see the tiger still lying stretched across the track.

Ashton dropped on one knee, while Clavering crouched behind him. The former's hands, however, were curiously unsteady as he aimed at the beast. He fired, but the earth spurted up a full foot to the right of where the tiger was lying. He had missed an almost certain target.

Then the men blinked in amazement, for the tiger had not moved a muscle. Ashton fired another round, only to miss again, yet still the tiger did not move.

THEY glanced at one another incredulously, conscious of some strangeness in events. Then they sidled cautiously forward, and when they were near enough hurled some stones on to the body. As it did not stir, they nerved themselves and walked right up to it.

It was quite dead, and its carcass was puffy and bloated almost out of recognition.

"My God," quavered Ashton, "the hornets win."

Clavering drew a shaking hand across his brow. "It—it must have been following *me* when I left the bungalow, and have quitted the *nullah* hours ago."

Ashton swallowed hard and remained silent; it was as if he could not speak.

"Thought I heard some noise when I was stung," continued the other, after a pause. "The tiger must have been just behind me," he shuddered, "so when I disturbed the nest, as I did, the hornets must have gone for it instead of me. Queer thing. The tiger saved me from the hornets, and the hornets saved me from the tiger. Why, what's the matter, man?"

Ashton was swaying on his feet, and his face was the color of chalk.

"May God forgive me, Clavering," he muttered thickly, "but I—I have a confession to make—"

"Then," interrupted the other, "we're quits, for I, too, have one to make. Let's just forget—and shake hands."

A QUARTER-OF-AN-HOUR later they were in their bungalow once more. With one accord they moved toward the mantelpiece to take away the stakes that had nearly broken, not only their friendship, but their lives. To their astonishment, the rupees had disappeared.

This was not surprising, considering that the native who had brought the news to the bungalow that afternoon had stolen them.

The SHIP that Tried to be Honest

A Story of Blackbirding, Piracy and Gold

By FRANK H. SHAW

SHE was built for the China trade—a stout challenge to the increasing supremacy of the steamship on the part of men who pinned their faith in strong winds and honest canvas: a good ship, a staunch ship: and in the beginning of things she fulfilled all expectations. From Hong Kong to Sydney she beat the mail-boat; and her captain held out the end of the boom sheet derisively as he gave the fuming steamer his creamy wake. Men swore by her—her record passages from Falmouth to Sydney Heads were historical.

But old-fashioned ideas must either amend themselves or be doomed. Steam had come to stay: the whole world was speeding up, faster and faster. There were liners making their twenty knots an hour; prophecies were afloat that even that colossal speed would soon be increased. The *Weatherly* vanished from the China run; wandered a while between London and Melbourne, stowed full of general cargo outward, of wool and tallow homeward; then she drifted to the nitrate and guano trade; lost money for her owners; and was ultimately bought by a more or less mysterious individual who said there was still a living to be picked up by men who had their wits about them and, as he put it, all their teeth in their sockets.

Captain Salmon—so he called himself—rubbed his hands as he looked the *Weatherly* over the day the purchase was completed.

"She's still a picture of a ship," he told Clements, his first mate.

"Does a man's eyes good to look at her," agreed Clements. "They've tried their best to spoil her, but there are some things you can't spoil. She needs a bit of rerigging here and there, but she's sound as a bell of brass."

"And whilst you're going over her, Clements, make it so that things work easily, eh? You savvy what I mean." They exchanged an understanding wink with one another.

"Everything will work like a man o' war," the mate said. "You couldn't have a better man for the job than me, though I say it who shouldn't. Have you got anything in your mind for the first venture?"

"Between ourselves, I have; that's why I bought her," Captain Salmon mentioned. "You can always find something to do—with money in it, if—" He whistled softly, giving his mate to understand that the rewards were lavish for such as were were not too particular. Tainted money bought as readily as clean money, anyway. It was tainted money, actually, that bought the *Weatherly* into clandestine trade. Salmon never told a living soul how that purchase price was won; and he quieted his own conscience without difficulty.

"We'll have to set about picking the right sort of a crew," the mate opined.

"You can leave that to me, Clements. I know where to find 'em." And he found his men, not in the recognized shipping offices or seamen's homes, where the honester breed of sailormen congregate in their spells ashore, but in low-down crimps' dens.

WHEN the *Weatherly* cleared for her first voyage under new colors, her decks were filled with a crowd that would have set any convict-prison warder to thoughtful scratching of his head. Clear of the river, with the pilot bobbing away in his boat, Salmon mustered his reprobates at the poop-break and looked them over. He was a big man, with a compelling manner; and his jacket pockets bulged and sagged. He kept both hands in those pockets while he spoke.

"A lot of you are drunk still," he said. "But what I've got to say will soak in, I guess. Where this ship's bound is no concern of any one's; she's bound out—that's enough. You'll be fed better than you've ever been fed in your lives. You've signed on at accepted rates of pay; but I don't mind telling you that there'll be a bonus for good work. You'll keep your mouths shut when you get ashore. You'll be allowed a ration of grog when I see fit—and I'm no niggard. When work's needed you'll work—like the devil! Any one got anything to say?"

"Me—I want to be put ashore," croaked a fellow from the quarter-deck. "I don't like the smell o' things here aboard. 'Twarn't my fault you bagged me, Captain. This ship ain't honest." He said so much—no more. Captain Salmon's right hand flashed from his pocket, exploding as it came; and the protester spun about. Not dead—a living man was of greater worth than a corpse; but the man-stopping bullet took him neatly in the shoulder.

"That's the sort of man I am," said Salmon carelessly, staring from face to face as the hiss of indrawn breath subsided. "Any one else?" There was no one else.

"That's settled, then. Bring that man aft—I'll doctor him. Get the muslin on her, Mister Mate." They clothed the beautiful tracery of the *Weatherly's* sparring with a cloud of rustling, droning white. From royal truck to waterway she was clothed; the sun gilding the rounded breasts of the sails.

"Heave the log and see what she's doing," ordered Salmon; and was obeyed.

"Seven knots," reported the second mate; and Salmon opened his eyes.

"Only seven? She's making fuss enough for fifteen. With this breeze, too—and by her old log-books, she ought to be making a baker's dozen easily. Try her again." The report was the same—seven knots. This was the ship that had sighted Sydney Heads sixty days out from home!

"Something wrong somewhere," gloomed Salmon. "If she doesn't do better we'll be too late." He decided that the mate's alterations in rig accounted for it; and these two laid their clever heads together. They stayed the foremast farther forward, and, as a result of strenuous labors, trimmed ballast in the holds until she was slightly down by the head—but the only result was to increase the *Weatherly's* sluggishness.

"Hope we haven't bought a pup!" said Salmon, in conference with the mate. "We want speed for this job; and we want modesty—something that won't attract attention. We'll try her again." And the result of their trials was to knock a bare extra knot out of her—and the good breeze still holding vigorously. Furthermore, when the breeze headed her, the *Weatherly* proved clumsy on a bowline: she failed to hold to the wind and her leeway was a thing to astonish those who navigated her.

"She's not ballasted deep enough," was Salmon's opinion; and when opportunity offered, made for the lee of Desertas, anchored there, and sent his boats ashore, in tow of a powerful launch that had been newly added to the ship's equipment, to make good the defect. Himself, during the time his men were busy, scoured the lone islet, in a vague and vain hope of discovering the fabled treasure buried there. The wind fell light when the ballasting was done, and the *Weatherly*, once more under way, merely effected a sluggish crawl into real fine weather.

"I suppose," said Clements one fine night after supper, when the bottle had passed mellowingly, "there's no harm in my asking what the job is, now that we're safely at sea?"

"We're going to get Willaston and Benger from Saint Mathilde," replied Salmon, at peace for the nonce, an excellent cigar between his lips. And the mate whistled softly. He was not a particular man, being, indeed, a tolerant man; but—

"Those two!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; why not? Their morals haven't anything to do with me; but the money their friends are willing to pay for them means a lot to all of us. Ten thousand pounds a head for safe delivery—that's better than hauling guano from Lobos to Hamburg, if I know anything."

"We'll be overpaid for the job," said the mate. "They're the two biggest scoundrels that ever escaped the rope. Can't understand how they did escape it!"

"The judges who sentenced 'em seemed to think a life-term on Saint Mathilde would punish 'em more than death; and they were about right. What's it matter to us, anyway, so long as we get the twenty thousand? I'm not a moralist."

"Pretty dangerous to turn those two loose on society, isn't it?"

Captain Salmon flung about. "The way I look at it is this," he said. "There are two men—dirty criminals, if you like—penned up on that convict island. They're worth ten thousand pounds apiece to me—to you and the lot of us, if they're free. Society can ruddy well look after itself. I know the risk I'm running—I'm being paid for it. Let it rest at that. You don't feel inclined to weaken, do you?"

"Good Lord, no! Don't ask me to be pleasant to 'em when they're aboard, that's all—even I've got scruples."

"They'll just be so much cargo. Let's have another drink."

THE *Weatherly's* crew had no cause for complaint during the following days; save that the captain's temper was uncertain. That was not their fault, it was because the ship failed to come up to expectations. They tried every conceivable device to better her speed; but the ship hung sluggishly; and when they manned the patent scrubbers, as they did, thinking that tropical weed might clutter her bottom sheathing, no appreciable benefit was secured. She did move a little less listlessly; but before she had got thoroughly started, the maintopsail parral carried away, and took the best of a day to repair.

"A lucky ship, eh?" gloomed Salmon. "Well, there are two kinds of luck: good and bad, anyway." He was in haste to get his job done satisfactorily, because he had a scheme in his mind for the snug investment of his earnings—an idea that promised to quadruple his capital at least: something to do with smuggling arms into a faction-torn republic.

It didn't matter a straw to him that the leader of the faction, who was prepared to pay handsomely for such accommodation, would drive his followers into abject slavery, were he successful in realizing his ambitions—by virtue of Salmon's bombs and machine-guns and the like. It didn't matter to him a straw that the civilized progress of the country would be retarded for twenty years, that her native wealth would be exploited for the aspirant's personal gain.

There was a reward in the venture, if he could buy the arms—and he knew where to get them, if only the money was forthcoming. Consequently, he fretted at the renowned *Weatherly's* tardiness. Indeed, he commenced to curse the fabric. But all the cursing in the world wouldn't hurry her. Something had been done to her since her splendid days: something living and vital had departed from her. Probably it was the alterations in her rig. Probably it was the unaccustomed ballast on her floors; she hadn't traveled much in ballast in her golden days of glory. People were only too eager to find space in the record-breaking *Weatherly's* holds.

However, the men didn't complain. They were well fed, they knew their pay would be handsome; and so—more days, more dollars. Salmon had them well in hand; and although the ship was engaged on a clandestine enterprise, there was no suggestion of piratical insubordination among her crew.

But even the *Weatherly's* reluctance could not keep her from ultimately arriving in the vicinity of Saint Mathilde, that bleak island devoted to the expiation of human sins against society. At about the same time the blue cloud showed on the horizon to inform Salmon of the proximity of his goal, a warship showed her smoke. It was the usual patrol, maintained to deter such an attempt as was in Salmon's mind. He was not afraid; he had a card or two up his sleeve. He held on his course; and inexplicable tides set the ship savagely to the southward; so that it was only by a miracle she was prevented from piling herself up on the low-lying Destergas Reef. Salmon yanked her from danger almost by the strength of his own two hands.

"THE devil's in the ship," he complained. "I've never known the currents set so strongly down here before." He sailed clean past the island, and only on the edge of night did he put the unwilling *Weatherly* about and stand again toward the land. At midnight he backed his mainyard and the powerful motor launch was noiselessly gotten over the side. Salmon himself took charge of the expedition; and every man of them all was armed to the teeth. A human life or two wasn't to be permitted to stand in the way of handsome profit. He had carefully studied excellent charts of the island; knew it and its possibilities like the palm of his own hand—better, perhaps, for men aren't overly prone to study the features of their palms—preferring to count the money that such palms will hold. He took the almost noiseless launch into a secret cove; and, leaving a man in charge, led the rest toward the prison. Relying on the loneliness and barrenness of the island, a place which could be searched by eye from the watch-towers, the guard was meager. It was not on record that any one had hitherto escaped from Saint Mathilde; for the criminals there imprisoned were of the vilest type, lacking friends; murderers and the like. The naval patrol was deemed adequate to handle the situation—for the virtue of an island is that escape must be made by sea.

Salmon and his men had brought a ladder—a light construction of bamboo. They negotiated the outer wall without difficulty. They were barefooted; almost nude, for the night was warm. They had discolored their bodies to render themselves less visible to curious eyes. They crept about the outer yard until they reached the entrance to the inner jail; the guard, relaxed, played a harmless card game by the light of a storm lantern. A carefully thrown stick extinguished the lantern; and before the guard understood that it wasn't a sea-bird's blundering, Salmon and his men were on them.

The guard drew bayonets; Salmon's men had knives. There followed some quick breathing, some messy work, and the gate was won. The intruders entered the prison, and made for the cells occupied by the two infamous criminals; cast the doors open, lugged them forth.

"Thought you were never coming," growled Benger. "We got the office, of course."

"Cut the cackle, come on!" was Salmon's only reply to that. The light of the electric torch he carried flashed onto a prone man—a warder who had chanced to challenge the party on its entry. A blow with a belaying-pin had quieted him. He lay there like a man asleep; his pallid face revealed in the zone of brightness. He stirred and moaned. Benger slipped the knife from Salmon's sheath and took a quick run; the unconscious man moved no more.

"He hit me once, the swine!" said the convict. "He won't hit any one else." And he laughed: this enterprising soul whose friends were willing to buy his freedom at a price of ten thousand pounds!

"Come on, if you've finished," said Salmon, and they went to the cove. A few extra doors had been opened, and certain of the malefactors, finding this to be the case, opened other doors with keys they took from officials. The prison became a shambles in a remarkably short time; and then the convicts discovered the spirit-magazine. After that their freedom mattered nothing to them; and the people of the patrolling sloop had no difficulty in rounding them up. There had only been a dozen warders or so murdered in cold blood.

Salmon took the launch out to sea until he saw a discreet light exhibited. Clements sniffed as the two refugees came up over the side into the light of his boarding lantern. He had his own standards.

"Smell anything?" asked Willaston.

"Nothing pleasant," answered Clements, and floored him scientifically. Then he kicked him below to the pen 'tweendecks that had been set apart for the quarry—a cunning hiding place enough, that would escape the keenest search.

"Get under way," said Salmon, when he returned. "And rerig her as she goes." Consequently daylight found the *Weatherly* standing far from the land, under a rig that would have puzzled the keenest observer. It was this facility of disguise that Salmon counted his strongest card. If a possible pursuer is looking for a ship he is hardly likely to trouble over a three-masted schooner. Counting his twenty thousand pounds in advance, Salmon whistled the dawn up out of the sea, and chuckled satisfiedly. The sea was deserted; Saint Mathilde the faintest of blue clouds in the remote distance—all was well. No significant pursuing smoke showed on the horizon.

"Easy as pie!" said Salmon. "So long as we're not too late in getting back." He meant his new project. The arms and bombs might be required at a comparatively early date, depending on the ambitionist's opportunities.

THE *Weatherly* proved less speedy under her new rig than under her old. Entering a patch of bad weather, she behaved like a hog, and very nearly swamped herself. It was nothing but Salmon's superb seamanship that worried her clear of her flurry and dragged her into finer weather, where her old rig was resumed—not to her great advantage, perhaps.

"Might be these two perishing wrong 'uns we're carrying," opined the mate. "They are enough to Jonah any ship—Benger's been telling me some of the things he did. He was so seasick that he thought he was dying, and wanted to ease his soul. God help the world when they're turned loose again!"

"Nip up aloft and see to that topgallant tie on the fore," said Salmon. "I'm going to crack on like Hades now." But as Clements walked along the deck, Benger, recovered from seasickness, remembered old scores and threw a knife that he'd taken possession of. It didn't kill Clements but it lamed him; he took to his bunk for a spell instead of going aloft. Salmon put Benger in irons under the muzzle of his pistol, and said that if anything of the sort happened again he'd have him flogged—ten thousand pounds or no. Benger snarled and subsided — awaiting opportunity. If he'd known anything about handling a ship he would not have hesitated to murder every more-or-less honest man aboard. He was a killer by instinct. But the languid *Weatherly* made the land before Clements was on duty again; and on that land was the port where Salmon had agreed to deposit his human salvage. An agent was in waiting there to pay over the reward in gold. As soon as the miscreants were delivered to him, so ran the contract, so soon would the freightage be paid. And Salmon rubbed his hands and chuckled, thinking of the auriferous future.

He piloted the *Weatherly* into harbor himself, and brought her to anchor. A launch put off from the shore.

"Bring those men on deck!" he shouted, and was obeyed. Benger and Willaston stood together on the *Weatherly's* fore-deck. A sudden sharp squall beat down through the gullies of the high hills surrounding the harbor. There was a sinister crack aloft as the tie of the foretopgallantsail yard carried away. It had never been overhauled. The spar crashed relentlessly down—down. It crushed Benger and Willaston to red horror in its descent.

"There they are," said Salmon gloomily to the saddle-colored agent, who, after a single glance, turned sickly away. "There they are—hand over."

"I pay for no dead men," said the agent.

FOR want of something better to do, Salmon employed himself in the lucrative blackbirding trade. It required little capital; and so was within his limited means. He'd intended to sell the *Weatherly*—unquestionably a hoodoo ship by now—but couldn't find a buyer. Even if the two convicts hadn't been killed—and Salmon touched never a penny of salvage on their account, for the agreement was quite clear—the chance to run that cargo of death was gone, for the usurper had already made his bid for power and ended his campaign in a noose at top of his rival's flagstaff. But as a blackbirder the ship might easily prove herself a gold-mine. Actually it was slave-running, of course—the unfortunate Islanders, snatched from their homes, were delivered into a shameful servitude at so much a head; and whether they lived or died mattered nothing at all to those instrumental in delivering them.

They paid, and they paid handsomely—that was enough for Salmon. He had sufficient money aboard to replenish his stores and give the men a trifle on account of wages; and he lulled them by golden promises of fortune. He took the *Weatherly* to the Pacific therefore; and in course of time sighted a lonely island, shunned as a lee shore by all honest craft. The inhabitants were reputed cannibals, and even the most indomitable of the missionaries hesitated to shepherd them.

Salmon made his preparations. He had acquired four ancient pieces of ordnance —men said he'd stolen them—and these he had cleverly mounted on traveling carriages. They were loaded with odd scraps of metal and shrapnel bullets and hidden under tarpaulins as he conned the *Weatherly* into the lagoon. Such of his men as were not visible were hidden behind the bulwarks, armed with shotguns and repeating rifles. On a silvery beach the natives made clamorous demonstration—whether of welcome or hostility it was difficult to know. Certain of them manned the great war-canoes and pulled out to greet the nearing ship in their own fashion.

"Fetch up that case of bombs," said Salmon, his jaw squared like a cliff. They were old-fashioned bombs—nothing to compare with the scientific death-dealers rendered familiar by a civilized war. They were, however, highly effective.

Behind the massed natives stood their village. It was a tawdry place of canes and grass.

"Right—let 'em have it!" said Salmon, and the four ancient muzzle-loaders roared their murdering message. While the gunners reloaded, Salmon and chosen men handled the bombs. The canoes drew near, received the missiles—considered them stupidly until they burst, and then ceased to exist as war-canoes, becoming merely shattered derelicts. Such of their people as escaped death were roped and hauled aboard the *Weatherly;* there they were tightly bound and hurried below. Another broadside was fired at the beach; and then, under cover of his guns, Salmon landed. He met with only trifling opposition from the awed, thunderstruck Islanders — his slapdash greeting had terrorized them.

Women and children were garnered and sent aboard—crammed down into the slave-tiers; and Salmon and his men hunted the distracted males this way and that—shooting such as showed opposition, gleaning such as threw down their spears and clamored for mercy. They were only insensate cannibals, anyhow, carrion; they probably deserved no better fate. Until the *Weatherly* was packed to suffocation point the hunt went on; and then Salmon replenished his storerooms from the village's stocks of meat and fruit, filled his water-tanks, and exultantly put out to sea. He was certain of a market for his wares. The Islanders were men of great stature and splendid physique, capable of doing much hard work; and their purchasers required workmen. The other blackbirders had probably been too timorous to exploit this promising field or maybe their schooners had appeared insignificant alongside the great war-canoes. Salmon rubbed his hands when the captives were driven on deck to be counted. He ordered every stitch of canvas to be spread to a favoring wind; for the sooner he had disposed of his cargo, the sooner could he return for more.

"There's a fortune in 'em," he confided to a recovered Clements. "And we've not a scratch among us. Wish we'd started at this game, instead of wasting time over those perishing convicts."

THE blackbirds were driven below—they were many, the *Weatherly's* crew were comparatively few; and it was no use taking unnecessary risks. But notwithstanding her spread of canvas, the *Weatherly* remained sluggish, laggardly. She ran into a belt of calms and variables, and the weather was very hot. The fruit was finished rapidly, and the water grew stale. Scurvy of a virulent type broke out among the cargo; men and women died like flies. They were unceremoniously pitched overboard to feed the legions of sharks that hovered near; and others died, and others. Compared with the servitude that would have been theirs, it was in a way a merciful release; but Salmon ground his teeth and cursed the *Weatherly*, from royal truck to keelson, as corpse after corpse slid overside. He saw his profits vanishing like smoke before a breeze, but resolved to demand a higher payment for such as remained. As it happened, however, the *Weatherly* did not make her destined port. There was no need to—not one blackbird remained alive a week before the land was sighted.

Desperate now, Salmon returned to the Island, and secured another human cargo in similar fashion to the first. It was slaughterous work; but it was necessary, according to Salmon's notions—his men would have to be paid somehow. But he had no better luck with this burden of freight than with the first—they sickened, died—were thrown overside. With empty holds, stinking like a pest-house, the *Weatherly* crawled into port. And there Salmon, desperate now, heard news. It was of a type that prevented him disposing of his hoodoo ship for what she would fetch. It was news that caused him to rub his hands exultantly together as he outlined the plan to Clements.

"Cold-blooded piracy," the mate affirmed.

"It's about our last chance, anyway; and it's safe. If you're scared—"

"Who said I was scared?" countered Clements, showing his teeth. "But this ship's unlucky; you can't get away from that; and you can't expect to pull it off as easily as eating pie."

"Damn the ship—it's all she's fit for," returned Salmon. "I don't care if she's sunk once we've pulled this thing off. We can tell the men about it when we get to sea."

They took the ship to sea, with a bond on her hull to pay for her stores and the trifle of wages that had been dished out to her crew. The S. S. *Trianti* sighted her when only three days out from port.

The *Weatherly* was in evil case, to all seeming; she had lost her foremast at the top, and her mainmast at the topgallant doubling. She was disheveled and flying distress signals; so the captain of the *Trianti*, a sympathetic man, for all his Dago blood, bore down to offer such succor as lay in his power.

He quite forgot the cases of specie in his ship's strong-room—specie to the value of one hundred thousand pounds. But Salmon remembered it as the steamer drew nearer, nearer still. His ancient guns were now loaded with ball, and still concealed beneath tarpaulins, but when the *Trianti* was within hailing distance he unmasked them, and let her have the four rounds in her engine-room. The *Trianti* halted in her mission of mercy suddenly. Beyond an antiquated revolver in her captain's cabin, she was entirely unarmed; for she was a peaceful trader, and the seas were reputed safe for such as she. A miracle appeared to be worked aboard the *Weatherly*: her missing masts reappeared with dramatic suddenness; and under deft helmsmanship she crept down alongside the *Trianti*. Salmon crossed from ship to ship at a bound, and shot the mate, who had thrown a knife with some accuracy. Then he crowded the pistol into the captain's face.

"Where's that damned specie?" he wanted to know.

"You hang for dees," gasped the captain.

"If any one gets to hear of it, yes—where's that gold?" said Salmon. Time enough to worry about the future—meantime there was the gilded present! The *Weatherly's* people were reluctantly conducted to the strong-room, which they broke into. Surveying the neat cases of specie as they were handed from ship to ship, Salmon rubbed his hands.

"We'll buy a steamer—a decent ship—with some of that," he exulted. He caused his storerooms to be replenished to bursting point, and then led his pirates back aboard his own ship. Had he not shattered the *Trianti's* engines he might have taken her as good prize and abandoned the hoodoo *Weatherly;* but now he had no choice. He waved his hand to the maniacal captain of the *Trianti* as the two vessels drew apart.

Then he said: "All right!" The four muzzle-loaders did their work effectively; they bored evil holes into the *Trianti's* hull below the waterline. Furthermore, reloaded with grapeshot, they made havoc of the one boat that was launched before the steamer went down.

"We're all in it now," said Salmon. "But they'll think she sank in a cyclone!"

AND so they would have thought but that a chance sent tramp discovered a floating grating to which was lashed the almost inanimate body of a seaman, who told a tale that was at first believed to be the ravings of delirium. It was a tale, however, that, repeated, fetched from its moorings a somewhat ancient and not entirely seaworthy gunboat, which proceeded bloodthirstily to sea. Salmon had intended to make for a suitable port; but the *Weatherly* ran into another belt of harassing calms and head winds which delayed her. A full-rigged ship had attacked the *Trianti;* a three-masted schooner slugged wearily under a scorching sun. On the morning a fair breeze came down, the horizon disclosed smoke-curls.

"Two funnels—phew!" said Salmon, summoned to inspect. "Well, they can't suspect us. But—have those cases handy—in case." He piled the muslin lavishly on the *Weatherly*, and headed her toward the hardly visible land. Had the old ship possessed her earlier sailing qualities he might have laughed the idea of pursuit and capture to scorn. But it was as well to get within territorial waters, perhaps, where the gunboat—he had recognized her as a gunboat by now—dared not intrude. The *Weatherly*, reluctant, refused to be hurried. They did all they could—they turned the fire-hose on the sails; trimmed the ballast; tautened everything that could be tautened. But the smoke grew a little clearer. Although the gunboat was an ancient tub, Salmon knew that though her engines were antiquated her ordnance far outclassed his obsolete muzzle-loaders and her crew outnumbered his five to one.

"We'll run through between Great and Little Asturgas," he announced. "We can do it by night—there'll be a moon. That fellow's drawing too much water to try the passage. We'll lose him during the night—he hasn't a chance." And as he spoke the dull thud of a distant shot beat down the wind. The resultant spout of water was not terribly far astern of the *Weatherly*. An hour later came another shell—it went through the foretopsail and reached the sea harmlessly.

"If he hits us and finds that stuff aboard, we're all strung up," said Salmon, no longer rubbing his hands. "Get the boxes on deck." The next shot was wide, as was the next; the following burst amidships, killing a couple of men but not materially damaging the fabric.

"Over with it!" commanded Salmon, gnashing his teeth. "If ever there was a hoodoo ship—!" And one hundred thousand pounds' worth of specie descended unostentatiously into deep water. The evening was drawing down; but there was still light enough for accurate shooting. The *Weatherly* held on her course for the channel between the Great and Little Asturgas, where safety might be found for hunted men. It had entered the mind of Captain Salmon that it was not mere chance that had brought the gunboat in pursuit; and he wished he had inspected the wreckage left from the *Trianti* more closely. He was mainly intent now on saving his own worthless hide. Perhaps he had been too expeditious in ridding himself of his loot; but those cases would certainly have sufficed to hang him had they been found. In any event capture meant imprisonment and he had no liking for the local gaols.

DARK night fell, to find the *Weatherly* still slugging onward. The gunboat, though nearer, was still far out of point-blank range. Salmon began to rub his hands again. With any sort of luck he was safe—he could see the loom of the two islands clearly and once through the channel the gunboat couldn't touch him. An hour afterward the *Weatherly* shuddered; there was a scream of torn copper sheathing; she stopped dead. She had sagged down with the current on to an outlying, submerged fang of the Little Asturgas, and was held as in a vise.

"Hell!" screamed Salmon. "We're done! Get out the boats!" The *Weatherly* suddenly tilted in such fashion that the lowering of the boats was impossible. Bright phosphorescent flashes in the marble black water overside betrayed the presence of innumerable ground sharks.

The gunboat's cutter took off such as remained next morning at daylight. Salmon they found in his own cabin, half his head blown away; a revolver clutched in his stiffened hand.

It may be the *Weatherly* was "hoodoo." Or it may be that, built by honest men, who had welded something of their honesty into her fabric with every hammer blow; employed in honest trade, manned by honest crews; she had merely done her best to be honest in spite of circumstances. They hold that certain ships have souls.

A salvage company took her in hand, attracted by her comeliness. It was really not difficult to salve her—she came off with remarkable ease, having taken the ground but lightly. There being none to whom to apply for reward, the salvors sold her for what she would fetch. She was patched up and rerigged—to run on the Portland timber trade—an honest trade. On her first trip she beat the best of the steamers!

Everybody's Meeting PLACE

Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion

DROPPING THE *WE*

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN who is, as you probably know, editor of *Adventure* advises me to use the first person singular in writing these random mutterings.

"But editors always use the editorial *we*," said I, somewhat aghast.

"That's all the more reason for doing something that everybody isn't doing," Hoffman insisted. "The editorial *we* was inaugurated to emphasize the great dignity and infinite superiority of editors to all other classes of men. That's bunk! Nowadays, everybody knows it's bunk. And the less bunk you have in your magazine the better your readers will like it."

So after this I am no longer we. I'm simply I. In other words, the I's have it.

HELP ME ANSWER THESE

WILLIAM R. KANE who is editor of the *Editor Magazine*, which is published to help striving authors, writes and asks me a number of questions that are difficult to answer.

"Are many writers sending you what might be called good stories but which are not up to the kind of thing the audience of EVERYBODY'S could be expected to like?"

The trouble about that question is how am I to know exactly what sort of stories you, the audience, of EVERYBODY'S does like?

The magazine has been changed in character too recently; and I'm too new as an editor.

Of course one can judge somewhat from the letters that come in from readers. These, however, give only a few guide lines.

I should say, after reading these letters carefully, that genuinely humorous stories are tremendously well liked; war stories and flying stories seem to be popular just now; good stories of the glamorous old West are almost sure fire; stories of the far North and of danger and dash in distant lands seem to go. Perhaps it just boils down to this: Everybody likes a good story no matter what type of story it is.

After all, what more can an editor do than select stories he likes and then hope and pray his readers will like them, too?

Mr. Kane's next question is even more difficult. He asks "What do you think of the present tendencies in technique?" To which I can offer no answer.

And to his third question, "Has a closely knit plot given way, in your opinion, to emphasis on the life values of fiction?" I can only reply, "Plot still seems terrifically important to me but a feeling that the story told has really happened is even more important. I think I'd place the sincerity of a story above everything."

Why don't some of you readers of EVERYBODY'S help me answer Mr. Kane's questions?

HERE'S ADVENTURE FOR YOU!

LAST month we published a novelette by Frank H. Shaw, *Two Million in Loot* and in these pages I said I knew little about Mr. Shaw except that he was an extremely popular English writer.

Since then I have had a long letter from him and as another of his stories appears in this issue it seems an appropriate time to quote from the letter. I found it extremely interesting.

When you ask me to let you know something about myself you get me guessing. I am publishing a book of memoirs in the early spring and in it I have written about 150,000 words without properly touching the fringe of things. But, sitting here, on a hill, within a mile of where *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Smike* stood by the stone marking a murder at the rim of *The Devil's Punch-Bowl*—that was before they met *Vincent Crummles*—and looking back, I see a youngster mad—keen to go to sea, from the time when, as an eleven-year-older, he accompanied his elder brother in a freighter to the Mediterranean. They tried to break me of the idea, and they failed—but not until after I was too old for the Navy. I went as apprentice in an old-time windjammer—donkey's tripes and a flatfish liver sort of packet. Three times round the world—Cape Horn in August!—roaming everywhere, and I passed for second mate. I was extra-master and in command at twenty-two. And in command I went round the world again, with a pretty poisonous crew. Was half-wrecked in the Bay of Biscay, managed to work the ship into a port of refuge. I've seen the sea in its every mood and, although I've swallowed the anchor, I'd go back tomorrow, but for obligations.

After that voyage I joined the Cunard Line, New York—Liverpool. I saw a lot of New York and Boston, and made fine friends. But I'd already got the writing itch. My father said my letters home were interesting, and advised me to try fiction. I did—a boy's story for The Captain; and it was bought. I saw myself scornful of Dickens and every one else that day! I went on writing whilst at sea, suffering the usual disappointments, gaining a very occasional success; but—a girl appeared. She wouldn't marry a sailor. I determined she should marry me; consequently the sea lost. With a dozen years' sea knowledge as stock-in-trade, I settled down ashore and started real writing. I didn't make literary history, but found that a year at writing brought me in more pay than a year at sea. So I got married, and things broke right.

As a first home I chose the Lake District; after three years decided it was where people went to end their lives rather than begin them, and shifted to Harrogate, where I went ahead like wildfire. I overwrote, of course. Ten thousand words a day was about my average output—with an occasional day's hunting. Writing as much as I did on patriotic lines I decided it was up to me to practice what I preached; so I took a Territorial commission. Every year my wife and I went a voyage to allay the sea-fever that fretted me. It was seafaring de luxe and failed to satisfy to any extent. Then came the war and I was snicked into it, *nolens volens*. I was given a job of work vacated by a distinguished regular officer on the day of mobilization. After a bit I wanted to get to France, so applied for transfer to the Naval Air Service; this was approved and I was apportioned to Porte; but before the transfer was effected, my division was sent to France—late '14.

I went through that winter in the Ypres Salient—it was *a* winter. I was in the Field Artillery, up near Boesinghe, which was a sticky sector but I got neither a scratch nor a decoration. Saw a lot of fine, confused fighting, though, because, being a writer and in the war, I was determined to learn all I could about things so as to be able to write the accredited history at the appointed time. After Second Ypres I tired of mud, and wrangled it to transfer to the Flying Corps.

But a year of flying on the Western Front found out the weak bit in my spine; and I was advised to try something less hectic. So I tried Secret Service; tracking down Zeppelins by directional wireless! Darned interesting, and once or twice efficacious. But a perfectly good admiral came joy-riding at the time of Paeschendale, and I was allotted to dry-nurse him along the line. He wondered why a sailor was soldiering—so did I. He went home fuming, and next thing I knew I was an officer in the Naval Reserve, appointed to one of the "Q" submarine-killers. That was piracy—proper piracy.

You never saw such a hard-case crowd as we were in your life. I had an Italian brig, with a four-inch gun and a couple of twelve-pounders, and forty Newfoundland fishermen and the sweepings of the big line of battleships. We scuppered a submarine or two—one was a proper Nelson fight—yard-arm to yard-arm in a way of speaking. Our first shell holed Heinie's conning-tower, so he had to fight it out on the surface. We won, as it happened; but my brig looked like the *Victory* after Trafalgar.. I lost a lot of good men, too. The U-boat left no survivors. The C-in-C at Malta told me that if I got another—after this second one—he'd give me a V. C., but the Armistice happened along too soon and I missed it. So I came home.

ANOTHER SEAMAN

LIKE Frank H. Shaw, Millard Ward who contributes *Del Rio Peaches* to this EVERYBODY'S has had actual sea experience. There must be something about the sea that makes men write. Ward says:

Having been at one time a deck officer in a sea-going freighter, I have always cherished an uneasy admiration for marine engineers. This may sound peculiar but it's true. Two or three years of being moderately dirty as a seaman and then you get your license and wear a white collar from that day on when you're in the deck department but your engine-room man doesn't get a white collar until he becomes a chief and then there are plenty of times when he has to take it off. The ship in which I was an officer was a small, dirty coal burner, and, while my own job sometimes fell short of luxury it was surely balm compared to the engineers' detail. So if the Bill Johnson of my story is rather more of a hero than the captain we must admit that he sweated for his laurels.

I gave the Navy a whirl at one time, too, as a midshipman at Annapolis but a case of pneumonia didn't mix well with shaky mathematics and I didn't last long there. The merchant service is more comfortable, anyhow.

AMONG THOSE PRESENT

AS TO the other writers in this issue, I've already given on page one the place of honor where comment is concerned to Francis D. Grierson, author of *The Smiling Death.*

Four writers make their second appearance in this issue—Blatz Henderson, Neil T. McMillan, William Corcoran and Reginald Campbell.

A story that I enjoyed personally with the keenest zest is *Strong Drink Is Raging* by Blatz Henderson. You probably have already guessed that from the way I've been burbling about it in various notes and forecasts. To me, it seems the funniest war story I've ever read. What do you think of it?

The only thing I have against Blatz Henderson is that Blatz Henderson isn't really his name—and why, writing such good stories, he doesn't want them to appear under his own name is a mystery to me. Mr. Henderson, so to speak, is managing editor of a New Mexico newspaper and in a recent letter he said, "I find my chief trouble or one of 'em is in getting leisure enough to enjoy myself with a bunch of cowpunchers or soldiers. I really get a lot of fun out of it and it is mighty gratifying to learn that others may also. And it all, of course, sets the wolf back another meal, an achievement for any newspaper man."

AMONG THOSE TO COME

NEXT month I'm happy to say Hugh Pendexter makes his first appearance in the new EVERYBODY'S with the sort of story, so his son, who's on the staff of EVERYBODY'S, tells me, first established his fame.

And next month, too, Ared White has a short novelette—the fourth story he's contributed to EVERYBODY'S; William Corcoran has his third story and Charles Wesley Sanders, his third.

You see, what EVERYBODY'S is trying to do, to a large extent, is to build up a staff of writers whose work will appear regularly in its columns. At the same time, the magazine is constantly looking for new talent.

Next month, for instance, look particularly for a stunning air story by Captain Jack Yeaman, his first appearance here.

We also have ready for your early approval, and we're sure it will be approval, some stories of the Navy, by Lieutenant-Commander R. P. Guiler, Jr., and several varied stories of adventure by H. M. Sutherland.

LETTERS FROM READERS

READERS of EVERYBODY'S are now writing in with gratifying regularity. Most of these letters are favorable, so favorable that I hesitate to publish them, even though they have made me perhaps a bit puffy in the hat-band.

One lady, however, wrote in that she was absolutely fed up with so much fighting, action and crime. I didn't know how to answer her for, of course, EVERYBODY'S is looking for stories of action; and a little crime and a lot of fighting seem to be an integral part of action.

No less a person than Heywood Broun of the *New York World* once said that no story was really good unless, somewhere, it had a first-class fight in it.

But if you don't believe I'm getting complimentary letters read this from John J. DeVoy of Baltimore:

> Your new EVERYBODY'S presents the most attractive appearance and contains the most entertaining fiction of any magazine on the newsstands. The serials by Captain Dingle and Selwyn Jepson are among the finest I have read, while the new one by Beatrice Grimshaw gives promise of surpassing even those.
>
> The short stories are equally good; special praise should be given to Mr. Campbell for his brilliant story, *Snake Bite*, in the February number. The cover on this particular issue is the best since you have adopted the new design. Mr. Ripley's painting is very colorful, and combined with the neat background makes a symphony of cerulean blue and red. Since the publication of the December issue you have made great strides in attaining perfection.

Now I know perfectly well that Mr. DeVoy is over enthusiastic. I know, too, that I shouldn't like such exaggerated praise. But did I like it? You answer!

If, however, you feel like hurling a brick or two, send them along. Praise or contempt are both admirable things. The one thing an editor can not stand, this new editor finds, is indifference.—O. G.

The NEWS *of* NEXT MONTH

Three Novelettes

Of War by Ared White

The first adventure of Sergeant O'Vane
(See announcement on page 93)

Of Africa by H. M. Sutherland

Black Men and Ivory is a story of a fabulous field—field is right—of ivory, an intrepid trader and a delightful wandering sleight-of-hand performer.

Of the West by Charles Wesley Sanders

Another of Sanders' galloping stories of the romantic old west. This one is called *Peacock Stuff.*

◆

And Among the Short Stories

Captains Fugacious, a humorous tale of the strange folks who have the concessions at county fairs by Hugh Pendexter; *Devil-Tails*, an amusing and rowdy story by Anthony M. Rud; *For the Good of the Service*, a first-rank flying story by Captain Jack Yeaman.